



# Letter from the YL SIG Coordinator

Dear YL SIG Members

The sig has had a busy six months! The Annual IATEFL conference at Brighton was probably our big highlight and we have a bumper number of write-ups, which fill this newsletter and make excellent reading. Many thanks to all the enthusiastic presenters and other contributors for their excellent articles. Now all that remains is to sit down for an hour or so and enjoy them!

When I last wrote, Wendy Arnold, from Hong Kong, had just joined us to take on the role of discussion list moderator. She has been beavering away, as you will read in her discussion list write-up. I would like to encourage all of you to join our discussion list - it is the one place we can all meet and communicate with each other. The recent discussions have been very interesting and Wendy's plans for Autumn through to Spring are very exciting. Wendy has since accepted to become part of our YL SIG Committee and has been actively participating in committee decisions now for some time.

Sadly we are losing Eleanor Watts, one of our two newsletter editors. Eleanor has been with us for many years and has worked hard to bring the newsletter to the quality it has become. She has also recently been involved in editing the IATEFL Storytelling Publication. Much hard work, but I know that Eleanor is delighted with the results. You will be pleased to read that all IATEFL members receive this publication. We too are very proud of what she has achieved and it is fitting that she should be saying goodbye but leaving such a legacy! I know that we will be seeing Eleanor occasionally as she is remaining with IATEFL on the committee of the Global Issues SIG, one of her other passions! But I would like to say on behalf of us all: "Many thanks for all your hard work and we wish you all the very best!"

Kay Bentley, who works in the Netherlands, is taking over Eleanor's role as joint newsletter editor, and is already collecting articles and ideas together for the Spring 2004 edition. Welcome Kay and thank you for volunteering!

As ever, the other committee members continue to work hard at whatever they do! Debbie Candy and Gordon Lewis coordinated the recent YL conference in Bielfeld (Germany) and are now busy organising events in Cyprus (Feb 2004) and Munich (Germany, November 2004)) and we continue to look for a venue for our developing country event, which we hope to coordinate in Autumn 2005. Carol Read has edited this newsletter and done a fantastic job! She is also currently inducting Kay to her new role, so a big **thankyou** to Carol! Andy Jackson and myself go to meetings and sort out paperwork! We are a team and I am, as ever, very proud to be working with such hard working professionals!

I hope you enjoy reading this issue and look forward to meeting some of you at the conferences we have planned.

Sandie Mourão  
YL SIG Coordinator

*Are you a member of the YL SIG?  
Did you get the summer e-mail update?*

**If not, your e-mail address needs updating!**

Please spend a minute or two and send a message to Sandie Mourão at [nettlehouse@mail.telepac.pt](mailto:nettlehouse@mail.telepac.pt) with your name, membership number and email address in the message. Your membership records will be updated and you will then start receiving our email updates. Our next one is due in December 2003/ January 2004.

# Editorial

## Carol Read

In the Spring issue of **CATS** we celebrated the Young Learner SIG's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In this issue, we're celebrating the SIG's new maturity with a special, bumper collection of articles, mainly by contributors to this year's IATEFL conference in Brighton but also by other writers too. It has been an enormous pleasure for me to be on the receiving end of so many interesting and insightful contributions trickling in over the last few months and I hope you enjoy reading this special issue as much as I have enjoyed putting it all together!

On the **CATS** menu for this issue:

- **Simon Smith** provides a fascinating account of a training session that used video to look at the 'slippery' metaphor of scaffolding and some thought-provoking reflections on the issues this raised.
- **Jean Brewster** gives us lots of ideas for using story books with children at the top of the primary range by focussing on 'spoof' stories of princes and princesses.
- **Marta Sigutova** shares the experience of a group of Czech teachers and trainers in teaching English to heterogeneous classes and examines the challenges teachers face when helping children with (mild) dyslexia learn.
- **Irma-Kaarina Ghosn** explores the benefits of using story-based instruction to develop academic literacy and provides a six-point plan for implementing story-based instruction in our own classes.
- **Olha Madylus** takes a sympathetic and understanding look at the problems of teenagers and provides ideas for teachers to cope when teaching seems to be uphill.
- **Wendy Arnold** provides us with the wherewithal to carry out classroom research on collaborative learning using projects and invites readers to embark on their own research and share their results.
- **Andrew Wright** takes a fresh look at paper and encourages us to use materials around us in a wealth of creative and innovative ways.
- **Maria Georgieva** explores ways in which a Whole Language Learning approach can enhance children's learning and the usual approach adopted in most primary coursebooks.
- **Isolde Mayer-Tauschitz** explores introducing English to very young children within the framework of nursery education and defines important issues for designing a teacher training programme for English at nursery.
- **Fran Gamboa** and **Caroline Linse** outline the benefits of project-based writing for young learners.

And if this isn't enough ...! In the rest of the newsletter, **Enric Vidal Roda** describes his experience at the Amazing Young Minds Forum organised by Pearson Education, **Wendy Arnold** describes some of the highlights on the YL SIG's Internet Discussion list and **John Clegg, Niki Joseph** and **Eleanor Watts** keep us up to the minute with reviews of some of the latest books.

To conclude, I'd just like to add a special note of appreciation and thanks to **Eleanor Watts**, who has recently resigned as co-editor of **CATS**, for all her help and comradeship in editing the newsletter over recent years. I'd also like to extend a big welcome to **Kay Bentley**, who will be joining me as co-editor from now on.

All the best,

Carol

# Using Video to Look at Scaffolding

**Simon Smith**

*When a participant on a summer in-service teacher development course asked me the question 'What does scaffolding look like?', I decided, after consulting her group, to use an extract of a videoed lesson in order to try to make this clearer. What follows is a brief explanation of scaffolding, an account of the session that used video to look at scaffolding, and a reflection on issues the session raised for me about scaffolding.*

## **What is scaffolding?**

The metaphor of scaffolding came originally from first language acquisition and cognitive psychology research. Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) examined the role tutoring played in helping thirty three, four and five year olds construct a pyramid from wooden blocks, a task they would be unable to do without help. They named the support the tutor provided in the one-to-one interactions *scaffolding*, and identified six distinctive features that seemed to help the children to complete the task.

These were:

- Recruiting the child's interest in the task
- Simplifying the task for the child by breaking it down into smaller steps
- Reminding the child of the aim of the task if attention began to wander (this tended to happen frequently with the three-year-olds)
- Explaining key aspects of the task, or showing other ways of doing the task
- Controlling children's frustration
- Demonstrating an idealised way of doing the task

The metaphor of scaffolding suggests temporary support, which is gradually withdrawn as the child is more able to work independently. Bruner (1983:60) refers to a 'handover principle', which involves a 'process of setting up the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful, and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilful enough to manage it'.

Bruner (1986; 75) later described the role of the tutor (Ross) in the pyramid experiment as 'consciousness for two', and linked the concept of scaffolding to Vygotsky's positing of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978 : 86) describe this as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'. Bruner appears to agree with Vygotsky's view of learning as a socially constructed process, one in which a more knowledgeable other can help the child develop cognitive abilities and language through interaction.

Though scaffolding was first discussed in a context unconnected with foreign language learning, van Lier (1988) argues convincingly that the same process may operate in second or foreign language learning classrooms.

### Using a videoed lesson to look at scaffolding

I am unaware of a commercially published video that has a focus on scaffolding, but fortunately, a Polish colleague kindly gave me permission to use a video of 9 year-old learners of English in a state primary school. They were starting their third year of English, and were studying the theme of dinosaurs. The videoed lesson was based

around the story of *Meg's Eggs* (Nicoll and Pienkowski). The extract shown and discussed involved the teacher using the pictures in the book to tell the story of the dinosaurs that hatch from Meg's eggs. The task for the learners was to understand the gist of the story.

The participants in the session were asked first to identify specific strategies the teacher used to help learners understand the story, and later to compare these to the six-point characterisation noted above. They were later asked to see if they could find examples from Cameron's summary (2001:9) (see below) of Wood's suggestions for ways in which teachers can scaffold children's learning:

Teachers can help children to	By
Attend to what is relevant	Suggesting
	Praising the significant
	Providing focussing activities
Adopt useful strategies	Encouraging rehearsal
	Being explicit about organisation
Remember the whole task and goals	Reminding
	Modelling
	Providing part-whole activities

The teachers noted examples which matched two of the original six characteristics of instruction, and four of the categories in Cameron's table. However, they also noted other strategies which they thought helped the children to learn, and which they felt did not fit neatly into any of the categories mentioned thus far. They noted in particular the teacher's use of gesture, of visual aids, and of ski-jump questions (see Cameron 2001:46). A lively discussion followed on these strategies. At the end of the three-hour session the participants said that they felt much clearer about the concept of scaffolding,

and also about other ways the teacher might help learners to understand a story.

### Reflection from the session on the nature of scaffolding

It will be clear from the account of the session that it was sometimes difficult to decide whether strategies the teacher used were scaffolding or not. Scaffolding was originally used to describe a strategy the teacher uses to help a child who is in difficulty. It was not always clear from the video,

however, if the teacher was using strategies to help learners with difficulty, to pre-empt difficulty, or both.

Another illustration of the slightly slippery nature of scaffolding can be seen from course participants' observation of the amount of non-linguistic support provided by the teacher. They wondered if there was a sense in which this, although not talk, helped control the children's frustration during the story, and in this way might be categorised as scaffolding. The categorisation itself is perhaps less important than the simple reminder that scaffolding may be only one strategy the teacher may wish to use with learners, as the context in which it occurs is specific.

A related thought concerned the suitability of the choice of video extract itself. The task the children had to perform was to understand the main points of a story. This concept of task may, in hindsight, have been rather loose, and may not be analogous with the kind of problem-solving task exemplified by the pyramid construction experiment. As an example, it was difficult to be confident from the video that the teacher's strategies helped children to understand the story, as the children's mental processes were not observable, whereas with the pyramid task, a clear result would have been observable.

Maybin et al (1992: 189) comment. 'We find the metaphor of scaffolding tremendously appealing in principle, and at the same time, problematic, or at least elusive, in practice.' My experience with the session certainly echoes their view. As a trainer, I think I learned something from the session. Should I use

video to look at scaffolding again, I would still feel comfortable looking at the nature of the interaction itself, but would feel more aware of potential fuzzy areas surrounding the concept of scaffolding. In addition, though I feel the videoed lesson was a useful analytical tool, I might next time film a more clearly defined, problem-solving task, and record both teacher and students' reactions to their interaction after the lesson. This could be used as a follow up to session participants' discussion of the scaffolding strategies they observe. The use of lesson extract transcripts (Cullen 1995) might be another worthwhile option.

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

# Princes and princesses, spoofs and stereotypes: fairy tales with a twist

Jean Brewster

The primary teachers I have worked with on story telling for over twenty years often raised the issue that it was easy to find an interesting story for younger pupils, but not so easy to select suitable stories for older learners. One solution we found was to focus on the genre of *spoofs* about princes and princesses.

## What are spoofs?

A spoof is defined in my dictionary as 'a mildly satirical mockery or parody' of something. The spoofs we used were stories like *Princess Smartypants*, *Prince Cinders* or *The Paperbag Princess* which were produced in Britain in the 1980s as a response to anti-sexist concerns about the portrayal of girls. These stories are all parodies of the traditional fairy tale, a *genre* or text typewhich older children often find boring and irrelevant.

Stories like this are useful for slightly older learners of perhaps ten to thirteen years old to trigger interest and discussion of issues like gender and stereotyping. These sound like difficult concepts, but the beauty of stories is that they can often contextualise issues that might otherwise seem very sophisticated or abstract. The idea of teaching aspects of 'citizenship' includes precisely this kind of stereotyping, so using stories like this is a good link with the primary curriculum.

## Using background or schematic knowledge

School-aged children are likely to have a clear idea of this genre from listening to fairy tales in their mother-tongue. As we now know, drawing on pupils' background or *schematic knowledge* is an important part of teaching reading with understanding. As Guy Cook wrote in 1989, this kind of knowledge consists of 'mental representations of typical situations...used in discourse processing to predict the contents of the particular situation which the discourse describes' (p. 69). Thus the pupils will have a clear idea of the typical content of fairy tales such as what a princess, prince or witch looks like, what they typically wear or do, where they live, the danger of forests, the role of frogs and kisses and so on. Using this knowledge the pupils can probably predict what they think will happen in this kind of story. In non-Western contexts there may be some interesting differences that could be mentioned. For example, in South East Asia, princesses are not usually blonde and blue-eyed, as they typically are in Western fairytales.

A pre-reading, or pre-listening activity using prediction can be carried out informally through discussion and the use of pictures, or can be focused on more clearly with a reading activity. The reading game I have used to focus on prediction is a 'read and classify'

activity called *Typical!* which is excellent for eliciting thinking and talking about stereotyping.

To play this game you need to have three (or more) category cards for main characters in fairy tales, such as Princes, Princesses, Queens, Stepmothers, Kings, Witches, along with a further set of statement cards which describe people like this. These might include descriptions such as: *they wear beautiful dresses, they live in a castle, they rescue princesses, they are spotty/ scruffy/ hairy* and so on. The cards also include statements which may not be true, such as *they are cruel*. These statements are read out loud and placed under an appropriate category card. Thus the statement card *they usually wear black* can be placed under the category card of *Witches*. The pupils need to use the adverbs *usually* or *normally* but otherwise simply practise reading and understanding the present tense and other language to describe appearance, activities and so on as they appear on the statement cards. This game needs to be demonstrated with the whole class but later when the learners are confident they can work together in small groups to read through the cards and place them under the appropriate category card. It is a good opportunity to introduce words which are opposites, such as ugly, beautiful; tidy, untidy; rich, poor; brave, frightened; grateful, ungrateful; kind, cruel; tall, short.

### Examples of spoof fairy tales

This work on predicting content is a useful prelude to the stories themselves, all of which break the accepted mould. *Princess Smartypants* describes a princess who is not a typical princess at

all, she wears dungarees, is very scruffy, likes being single and does not want to marry a prince. The King and Queen insist she must marry so Princess Smartypants sets extremely difficult tasks for ten princes to try, hoping that they will all fail. They all do fail except for the last one. Can you predict what happens next? You will need to read the story to find out! (see more on this story in Ellis and Brewster, 2002).

*The Paperbag Princess* is another tale which breaks the mould. A prince is carried off by a dragon and imprisoned in a tower. This time it is the princess who through her bravery manages to trick the dragon and rescue the prince. Do you think he is grateful? Read the story to find out.

*Prince Cinders* is spotty and skinny and wants to be manly like his hairy brothers. A fairy turns him into a big hairy monkey and the story ends up with a princess trying to find the trousers that the prince has lost. Do you think she marries the prince and lives happily ever after?

Finally *The Tough Princess* is a story about a princess who refuses the help of fairies to find a handsome prince but spends many years looking for one herself. In the end she wakes up a sleeping prince with a kiss but then he hits her. Does this spoil the romance? You know what to do to find out...

### Activities to develop the 3 Ms

If we think of three stages of language learning from a *learning-centred* perspective we can think of three stages, which I call the 3 Ms: initially pupils' *meet* new language, *manipulate* it and

finally *make it their own* ( see more on this in *The Primary English Teacher's Guide, chapter 4*). After the pupils meet the new language of the stories use an activity where they manipulate this language. An example on the theme of stereotyped thinking is *Typical Bingo*. Here, after hearing more of the story the pupils can play a more sophisticated version of the traditional Bingo game to match a typical stereotypical statement against a character. For example, the teacher may read out, *they are brave and strong* and the pupils cover the word *Princes* or *Princesses* on their bingo cards. For *Typical!* (Read and Classify) and *Typical Bingo* the pupils might like to make their own cards and drawings so that other children can use these games in groups. This will have the effect of raising pupils' awareness about the fact that there are certain accepted conventions and modes of thinking about people, in stories and in real life, but that they are not always true and can be broken. Finally, in pairs or groups the children might like to think of different characters, work out what they typically do, where they normally live, what they typically look like and what they wear. Then they can try to make up some funny contrasts and opposites to break the stereotype. Here the learners are being encouraged to make the new language their own in creative ways.

We have seen how stories like the ones described above can remind learners of their previous knowledge and capitalise on it by using a reading activity where pupils meet new language; they then turn this knowledge upside down by listening to spoofs. When confident with these ideas and the attached language they can then be supported in manipulating the language further

through games like *Typical Bingo*. Finally the pupils can make the language their own by trying out their own ideas to have a bit of fun. We have to remember that only having access to simple language does not always have to mean doing only simple thinking. In my view, it is possible through spoofs like these to engage older learners with the kind of *supported challenge* that encourages language learning but also thinking and learning for life.

Now, I've just found a range of stories that discuss other kinds of stereotype, such as Grannies and what they usually look like and do. But that's a story for another time...

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*A trained primary teacher, Jean Brewster has worked with primary English teachers from all over the world for over 25 years. With Gail Ellis she is the author of several publications, including The Primary English Teacher's Guide and Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers. She currently works at the Institute of Education, Hong Kong.*

# Teaching English as a foreign language to children with (mild) dyslexia

Marta Sigutova

*Many primary school teachers of English in the Czech Republic have recently expressed their concern about an increasing number of children in their classes who have been diagnosed as dyslexic, or who seem to demonstrate some signs of dyslexia. It has become apparent that primary school teachers and teacher trainees need help targeted at specific needs of children with dyslexia included in mainstream English classes. A group of Czech EFL teachers and trainers participated in the British Council Project on Teaching English to Heterogeneous Classes (run from 1999 – 2001). In this paper, I would like to share some of the experience we have gained so far and to examine some of the challenges EFL teachers face when helping children with dyslexia learn.*

## Modern foreign languages and dyslexia

Features of dyslexia can be observed especially when it comes to reading and writing, and in this respect, a foreign language is no exception from the mother tongue. Slow reading, reading without comprehension or reading with many errors, frequently bizarre spelling and wrong punctuation, poor use of syntax (e.g. word order), difficulty in structuring ideas and difficulties experienced physically when writing by hand. All these contribute to poor performance which is often labelled as careless, untidy or plainly a mess, all the more so when children appear to be bright and do much better orally.

However, dyslexia is much more than difficulties in learning to read, spell and write. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine various definitions of dyslexia. The following words perhaps best encapsulate what dyslexia means for learners:

*Dyslexia is a neurological difference of dysfunction...It is a neurological status which may cause academic difficulties and*

*impede the ability to organise, plan and schedule effectively. (Krupska and Klein, 1996:10).*

It is important to note that the difficulties mentioned above may vary considerably and individual children are likely to exhibit a different pattern, from mild to very severe cases. What is worth noting, though, is a significant discrepancy between the child's intellectual ability and his/her reading and writing skills. This should alert the teacher to suspect that children may be at risk of dyslexia, and an assessment is needed to record the child's needs.

## How can we teach children with dyslexia in the way they learn?

Foreign language learning is '*unlikely to be easy for any dyslexic learner*' (Crombie, 1997:47), but it is important to understand that '*dyslexic children think and learn differently*' and that they '*need to develop strategies to deal with those left hemispheric skills they find they need and to allow their right hemispheric skills to grow and flourish*' (Dyslexia in the Primary Classroom, 1997:2, 4). What then, may be of benefit?

## An early recognition of difficulties

Although some teachers of EFL may believe that by the age of 9 when children usually start learning the first foreign language, they will have been screened and assessed on account of difficulties in their respective mother tongues, our experience has shown (Nolan, 2001: Appendix B:2) that this is not always the case. The least we can do is to train trainees and teachers of English to see the first warning signs through informed observation.

## Differentiation

This refers to a teacher's skill to differentiate tasks for different learners in class, to accustom the class to working on different activities and importantly, to accustom the class to helping each other. This is not an easy concept, and more difficult to apply in some classes than in others, where it may be a completely new idea (Nolan, 2001: 6,7). What may be recommended in general though, is a thorough analysis of a teaching/learning programme, i.e. of its content, activities and outcomes required. An informed teacher can anticipate difficulties which children with dyslexia will face, and consequently, work out differentiated plans of action to use in class. Teachers may be familiar with some differentiated activities, such as

- open-ended exercises
- offering a choice of activities for learners to choose from
- setting a minimum requirement which **all** learners should meet
- setting group assignments, etc.

Further, as Edwards (1998 : 39) claims '*the same activity sheet can often provide for a slightly different task while the content may be broadly similar*'. For example, in terms of response to a similar content, learners may be asked to do one or more of the following:

- to draw pictures

- to label activities
- to use word cards and write a response
- to use their own words in writing a response. (For more ideas on grading task difficulty see Edwards, 1998)

## A variety of approaches to teaching reading and spelling

As Ott (1997) emphasizes '*no method on its own will succeed, but phonic approaches in combination with other reading methods and multisensory teaching have been found helpful*' (Ott, 1997:77).

Few teachers of young learners need persuading that communicative, multisensory approaches to teaching foreign languages help all children learn, including children with dyslexia.

Still, as Ott (1997) maintains, children with dyslexia benefit from a structured, cumulative programme with plenty of opportunities for overlearning when they learn reading, spelling and writing in English as their mother tongue. I would like to argue that this issue has not yet been given full consideration among EFL teachers. Teachers and teacher trainers of English are not always trained to use phonic approaches to teaching reading and spelling in English (Nolan, 2001: 5,6), partly because communicative approaches (in practice) have emphasized fluency over accuracy, partly because the English spelling is inconsistent. Yet there are rules and patterns to be discovered, and in real life, learners will be expected to read new words they have not seen before.

No doubt, most qualified EFL teachers will have had a strong basis in phonetics and phonology. Therefore, it is mainly a question of raising awareness and turning teachers' attention to a structured *phonic* programme of teaching reading, as for example described in Crombie (1997). Crombie (1997: 25 – 30) maintains that

the reading/ spelling programme should start from very small steps, such as reading two-letter words (in, on, at...), then three-letter words (cat, hat, fat...), and only then proceed to longer words which keep the same pattern (make, cake, lake). The view of the importance of phonic approaches when teaching reading and spelling is further supported by Davies (2003). Similarly, Pollock and Waller (1997) argue that a cumulative, structured approach is more helpful in developing literacy skills (as this makes rules explicit), than practising spelling on a random collection of words from one topic (e.g. Family).

Obviously, there are still questions regarding approaches to teaching English as a foreign language rather than as a mother tongue. The recommendations drawn from the BC Heterogeneous Classes Project indicate that these questions '*are unlikely to be resolved except through further systematic investigation and sharing of best ELT practice*' (Nolan, 2001:23).

However, hand in hand with further investigation, it would be very helpful to receive support from publishers. Although many EFL teachers do use a number of supplementary materials, I believe there is a niche in the market in provision of ELT materials focused on specific needs of children with dyslexia. I dare say this applies not only to primary but also secondary coursebooks.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, although it may be said that there are no magic ways, I feel that it is the teachers' skills of differentiation and a wide choice of appropriate materials available that is vital for helping learners become more effective. As for currently used EFL coursebooks, it seems obvious to recommend that specific educational needs of children with dyslexia should be

reflected in the materials teachers and learners use.

Finally, for teacher trainers, like myself, this is a new inter-disciplinary field, on the edge with special education. I feel that especially at this exploratory stage, there are many questions we need to address in the near future. Sharing experience and knowledge with colleagues from other countries may be one of the ways.

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*Marta Sigutova worked as head of the three year 'Fast Track' project (English Teacher Education College) in the Czech Republic between 1993 - 1996. Since finishing her MA studies at the University of Reading in 1997, she has worked as a teacher trainer at the Faculty of Education, University of Ostrava. She is interested in issues of testing, assessment and teaching English in heterogeneous classes.*

# Story-based Instruction for Academic Literacy

**Irma-Kaarina Ghosn**

In many countries, children study some or all of the school subjects in English, which is a foreign language to them and their community. In some cases, even initial literacy instruction happens in a foreign language, as is the case in Zambia and Lebanon. This implies early development of academic literacy in the language of instruction. Classroom-based research indicates that story-based language instruction, built around quality children's literature, is more appropriate in these contexts than the typical approach adopted by most coursebooks. By 'literature' I mean stories which are written by professional children's authors for children to enjoy, and which feature timeless, universal themes and have literary merit. This definition excludes didactic materials as well as simplified and/or graded works (with few exceptions).

## **Why story-based instruction for academic literacy?**

There is now a rich body of empirical research exists that supports the use of children's literature in second language teaching. Warwick Elley's experimental 'book flood' studies in South East Asia and South Africa (e.g. Elley 2000; Elley et al 1996) provide particularly valuable support for story-based instruction (SBI), as they have involved several hundred children. These studies clearly show that exposure to a large selection of storybooks has a positive influence on all four language skills and that some of the benefits carry over to other school subjects taught in English. Two

studies I conducted in Lebanon, one involving 163 5<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (Ghosn, 2001) and the other 137 pupils in grades 4 – 6 (Ghosn, 2003), revealed that story-based programs can result in significantly better reading comprehension and written expression than the traditional EFL/ESL programs. Interestingly, children in the story-based groups had also significantly better comprehension of science and social studies vocabulary and were better able to follow written schoolwork directions than their peers in traditional language programs. While story-based instruction did not have a significant influence on pupils' grammatical accuracy, it did promote greater fluency and more active participation in the discourse.

## **Why does story-based instruction work so well?**

First, my research indicates that quality literature generates the kind of meaningful, interactive, and negotiated discourse associated with successful second language learning, whereas the communicatively oriented role-play and dialogue practice typical in primary school ESL/EFL books often fails to accomplish this. Stories seem to provide a culturally more appropriate social context for classroom interactions, because story discussions and follow up activities enable teachers and students to remain in their culturally appropriate roles while interacting around the story. During story discussions, children use the new language to express their own ideas, as opposed to trying to situate themselves in an

unfamiliar context to practice the new language and exchange personally irrelevant information (Ghosn, 2003). Second, the rich, contextualized language and varied content not only contribute to children's development of lexical, syntactic and semantic knowledge, but also increase their knowledge of the world, as Eve Gregory (1996) has pointed out. This explains the better reading performance in social studies and science. Finally, story-based instruction is heavily reading-centered, and, because much academic content must be obtained from books, good reading skills facilitate learning of new subject matter.

### **How to implement story-based instruction in your classroom**

1 Select high quality children's books, appropriate for the proficiency level and interest of the children. Good picture storybooks can be used with primary school children even when they are written for very young children, provided the illustrations are aesthetically pleasing and support and extend the storyline. Ideally, select stories with significant, universal themes, but without forgetting stories that give a good laugh. Avoid trivial works that offer nothing meaningful to talk about and that do not contribute anything to children's development. For beginners, cumulative stories, as well as stories with repetitive refrains are particularly successful. *The House that Jack Built*, *The Gingerbread Man*, and *The Enormous Turnip* are some classic examples, while Eric Carle's works represent some of the best contemporary literature for children. (Picture books with aesthetically pleasing illustrations are enjoyed even by beginning learners in upper primary school.) When selecting stories, keep in mind that a quality children's literature, including picture books, offer something also to the adult. If the story does not 'speak' to you, discard it.

2 Decide how to introduce the story, activate children's prior knowledge, and arouse their curiosity. Examination of the cover art and use of real objects are just some ways to prepare children for the story. In the preparation phase, introduce any relevant vocabulary and model structures in a meaningful context: *What do you think the story will be about? Do you think it could...? What if...?* Children pick up L2 structures, such as question forms, without explicit teaching as long as teachers use them frequently in a meaningful context.

3 Determine how to approach the story. You can tell it, using the illustrations or relevant props, or use an interactive, 'shared reading' approach usually associated with 'big books': *See, here's Baby Bear's chair. It's broken. What do you think Goldilocks will find upstairs?* Either way, you will be able to introduce or reinforce key vocabulary and structures. If children are independent readers, you will need to provide a purpose for reading: *Let's read to find out how this story is similar to...* If the story is high quality, children will want to re-read it or hear it told several times.

4 Plan what language to reinforce during the story discussion. Avoid asking *Did you like the story?* as this and similar closed questions can be answered in one word. Rather, ask what they thought about the story, a character or an event: *What do you think? What makes you think that?* Teach children appropriate ways to express differing viewpoints and to justify their own opinions: *So, Sami thinks that... Do you agree with him about ...? Why do you disagree with him? Rami disagrees with Sami because ... What do you think?* Ideally, allow the discussion to follow children's lead and remember that each reader constructs their own meaning of a story. Undoubtedly, beginners in particular will use their L1 during the discussion, and –

yes! – it should be allowed. Validate the contribution and recast it into English within the flow of discourse: *That's right. She broke Baby Bear's chair.* Beginners' L1 utterances are a rich source of raw material for you to use when moving the discourse on. (Needless to say this is possible only if the teacher understands children's L1. The teacher, however, should use only English.)

5 Plan for appropriate follow-up activities. Children can re-tell the story while you write it on the board. Encourage children to return to the story to verify facts or the sequence of events. This gives a meaningful reason to re-read the story or parts of it. *How did the story begin? What else did X say?* When finished, invite children to revise and edit their story while you model the use of proof-reading marks. If children can write, they can copy their story in their notebooks and add illustrations. Alternatively, you can type their story (in large font size) on sheets of paper and make copies for each child to illustrate. Children can also make up dialogues for narrative stories, practise them and present them to class. This will be a very different experience from the coursebook dialogues. Dramatizing is an essential part of story-based instruction and gives children plenty of meaningful and enjoyable practice with the new language.

Trickster tales, *pourquoi* stories and cumulative tales provide excellent models for children's own writing. By changing minor elements in a story, even beginners can 'write' their own stories. Take, for example, *Goldilocks and the three bears*. When the bears are changed to foxes or tigers, and/or the porridge to rice or soup, or Goldilocks to a boy, we have a totally different story while the language remains largely the same. Children can copy the rest of the story as is, illustrate it, and read it to their peers! You can use these new stories

for familiar language development activities, such as jumbled sentences and so forth.

6 Consider the possibilities of linking the story to children's own life experience and/or to topics they are studying in other classes. For example, Andersen's classic, *The Ugly Duckling*, naturally links to both discrimination and intolerance for diversity on the one hand and the life cycle of birds on the other. The old folktale about the enormous turnip similarly links to both the power of co-operative effort and growth of root vegetables. All good stories enable you to build thematic units that enhance not only children's language skills but also their knowledge and real-world skills.

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*Irma-Kaarina Ghosn holds a Ph.D in Applied Linguistics from University of Leicester and an M.Ed in Psychology and Social Foundations of Education from the University of Virginia. She is Assistant Professor of Education and English (TESOL) at the Lebanese American University in Byblos, Lebanon, where she also directs the Institute for Peace and Justice Education. Her 'Caring Kids: Social Responsibility through Literature' received the Mary Finocchiaro Award for Excellence in the Development of Pedagogical Materials from TESOL in 1998. Irma is now developing a thematically organized, story-based course for primary school children.*

# Teenagers – What's their Problem?

**Olha Madylus**

*Moody, sullen, cocky, loud, clumsy, uncontrollable, self-conscious, defensive, opinionated, rude, arrogant, bored, vain... Do any of these adjectives spring to mind when you think of your teen students?*

## **What is their problem?**

There are so many different pressures that teens are under. Firstly, they are undergoing huge physical changes: voices are breaking, acne is rampant, breasts are growing, body hair appearing. It must be like being in the film 'The Fly', wondering what will sprout next - scary. Have you ever said 'Have a nice summer' to a small boy, who returns to class in the autumn a strapping, tall, gangly lad? Little wonder he's clumsy and awkward, with limbs that seem to have doubled in size.

Then there are the psychological changes that accompany the physical. Becoming aware of their body changes leads often to either painful self-consciousness = the shy, reluctant student, or to a heightened consciousness of femininity or masculinity = the cocky, flamboyant student. Starting her periods is often a confusing and uncomfortable time for a girl, who may find it hard to deal with hormonal mood swings = the moody & sullen student.

If Piaget is still a term of reference for us, we will recognise that teens have moved into the formal operational stage of their development, where they are now able to think in abstract terms and are able to look outside themselves at the world around them. So we see the Teens who take on great causes,

become vegetarians, want to take on the world. We need look no further than recent anti-war demonstrations by school children in the UK to have examples of this kind of strong emotive response to world issues.

I still recall the total frustration of the mixed messages that adults around kept sending the teenaged me. One minute it was 'Stop behaving like a child' and the next 'You're far too young to .....'. Urgh! How was one supposed to behave?

Sex creates its own problems too. In terms of gender identity, the vast majority of the world still distinguishes between behaviour that is appropriate for one gender and not the other. The teenager must deal with the world as a male or female and behave accordingly, hearing 'That's not ladylike', 'Boys don't cry' etc. Billy Elliot is not the only child ever to have their decisions mocked because of their gender, leading to discomfort, confusion and frustration.

If teens are becoming more aware of sex and their sexuality, it therefore follows logically that at times in class their attention may be wandering. Blushes, giggles, mortification and despair may well ensue.

In loco parentis may be sweet when a five year old calls us 'mum', but if teens are confronting and rebelling against their parents, is it surprising that they may do so with us too?

If all this wasn't enough to make a teen's life hellish, let us not forget their need to be accepted by their peers and what we see displayed is *pack* behaviour that may manifest itself in their reluctance to answer teachers' questions because it's just not cool!

*It really IS tough to be a teenager – that's their problem.*

### What can teachers do?

Step one is to understand what teenagers are going through. It does make it easier to look at teens in a sympathetic light and not take the outward manifestations of their inner turmoil personally.

One way we can look at how to help teens is by considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how they may translate into classroom strategies for teachers.

Maslow's hierarchy	Teacher's strategy
Physical needs: food, water, shelter etc	Give students chances to move around, use up energy, get comfortable. Don't moan about them slouching etc all the time. Would it kill anyone, if they ate that bit of chocolate?
Security	Be consistent and get them to understand you are a partner in their learning not an adversary. Allow Teens to opt out. Silence may be their comfort zone. Do not tolerate any ridicule or personal criticism of any students. Encourage openness. Allow Teens to make choices in class.
Social acceptance	Work on creating a team spirit in the class. Accept them as they are. Be honest with them and encourage them to accept you as a person, not just a teacher.
Self esteem	Give everyone opportunities to shine: sports quizzes for the sports buffs, projects that allow artistic students to show their talents etc.
True achievement	Believe that anything is possible and encourage them to believe it too.

### Music and songs

Just one of the strategies I use is incorporating songs and music into lessons with this age group, as it is not only Teen-friendly but also great for their language development and practice.

#### Teen-friendly reasons:

- Teens like songs and music and have strong personal preferences about what they like

- There are many songs that are about issues of interest to this age group
- Teens can choose English songs they like for classroom use
- Songs often contain current usages of language that are meaningful to Teens
- Music can help promote a relaxed, stress-free atmosphere in the classroom

- Music can stimulate strong feelings that can be channelled to enrich the language learning experience

### Language development reasons:

- Songs often include a lot of repetition that helps to make language memorable. Also, because the songs may have personal meaning for Teens, the language will be even more memorable
- Songs contain chunks of language that Teens can remember and use
- Songs are sung at a reasonably fast speed and contain natural phonological features, like linking and weak forms, that students learn to recognise and be comfortable with

### Spot the mistakes

An activity that my teen students really enjoy doing with a song is 'Spot the Mistakes'. Write out the lyrics of the song, but make about 20 mistakes e.g. change the tense, write an opposite or synonym instead of the correct word. The first time they listen to the song, ask them to underline the words that are different and the second (or third) time actually write what they hear above the word or phrase that is wrong. After each hearing they can check with each other – in a mixed ability classroom this ensures no-one is left behind and gets demotivated.

After they have checked that they got the right words, ask them to go through and see if the mistakes were words or phrases that were the same, similar or opposite in meaning: a good focus on vocabulary and/or grammar.

### Background music

Having music playing in the background during lessons can help create a positive learning environment. Play music while students work in groups discussing, planning or doing language exercises. I choose instrumental music or songs sung in a language students do not know, so that they aren't distracted by the words.

- The music helps create a relaxed atmosphere
- Often when students are asked to speak together in English, they feel shy about speaking up. With music they need to raise their voice to be heard by their partner(s).
- If groups of students are planning or competing, they do not want to be heard by other groups, so the music creates a barrier of privacy
- If students do not like the music I choose, I welcome their contributions of background music, increasing their sense of ownership.

When planning lessons for Teens it is important not just to consider their language development needs, but their particular and very pressing needs as children making a painful transition into adulthood.

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*Olha began teaching teenagers over twenty years ago in the British secondary state system before joining the EFL profession. She has taught, trained and managed EFL in the UK, and with the British Council in Hong Kong, Venezuela and Greece. She is currently working as a freelance YL trainer and consultant. She also writes the YL pages on Macmillan's website:*  
[www.onestopenglish.com](http://www.onestopenglish.com)

## 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"*

MA in TEYL Student - Graduated 2001

*"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"*

MA in TEYL Student - Graduated 2000

*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](mailto:efl2@york.ac.uk)**

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

# Collaborative Learning: Putting Theory into Practice using Projects

Wendy Arnold

*This article will consider the use of projectwork to apply learning theories into practice. It will explore if using project work can promote collaborative learning and employ classroom research to evaluate its effectiveness. The results have not been shared as it is hoped that others might follow the same process and a collaborative paper published.*

## Identifying the learning theories and what they mean

Much has been written about the difference between learning and development (Piaget in Donaldson 1987; Vygotsky 1978; Bruner in Williams & Burden 1997; Krashen in Lightbown & Spada 1993) and the discussion and theorizing is ongoing, but for the purpose of this article the learning theories which will be applied are:-

1 Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* or ZPD (Vygotsky 1978:90), implying that learning is ahead of development, and for development to occur, interaction with adults or more knowledgeable peers is needed. The potential development is possibly that which is not yet complete, but can be understood with some help, so suggesting that learning is an on-going process with a ZPD continually being created (1978:87). Vygotsky also stressed the role he believed that language had when being used to 'organize the child's thought' (1978:89) which adds to its communication purpose.

2 Bruner's theory of *scaffolding* (Maybin, Mercer & Stierer 1992:187) which seems to extend Vygotsky's ZPD theory by defining the role of the more knowledgeable adult or peer who are actively involved in the learning processes by closing the gap between what has been partially and fully understood.

So what does this mean related to young learners? It would seem to mean that all learners know a little more than they understand and social interaction with others develops cognitive competence, because information to complete understanding is conveyed by more knowledgeable others. The implication is that learning is a social experience and you learn by collaborating with others.

## Why projects?

Project learning encourages 'learner independence' by helping learners to make choices and take 'responsibility for their own work' (Phillips, Burwood & Dunford 199:6-7).

Learner autonomy and teacher development has been linked by Edge & Wharton (1998:296) who illustrate the

value of making 'choices', which they say is a 'prerequisite to the sense of ownership which is necessary for people to take responsibility for their development and to engage their critical faculties'.

So how does this relate to young learners? It seems that using projects would give all learners an opportunity to bring their knowledge of the world into the classroom, as well as extend it by interacting with both the teachers and peers.

### **Some questions to ask yourself**

As this research will take place in a classroom setting and is 'problem-focused', that is, you want to find out if these learning theories can be evaluated using projects, (Wallace 1998:15), it makes more sense to call it *classroom research* or CR (van Lier 1988:1).

You will also need to consider what exactly it is you are looking for, and how you are going to set up the projectwork, in order to see some evidence that collaborative learning theories are valid.

Freedom of choice has already been mentioned as valuable in learning and this CR was implemented with the following questions:-

- a) Does giving young learners the freedom to choose their project topic promote collaborative learning?
- b) Does this benefit all the young learner's in the group?

### **The experiment**

Having identified a 'vehicle' in the Garvian sense (Garvie 1990) by using projects, an experiment is needed to test your hypothesis that project work motivates collaborative learning and to focus more explicitly on your question: Does freedom of choice in selecting a topic, influence collaboration more than would be the case if a topic theme is prescribed?

### **Identifying the subjects**

So whom are you going to investigate? To parallel the experiment outlined, you will ideally need two resembling classes of monolingual, homogeneous speakers, aged 10-12 years old.

Organize the classes into groups of 3-4 young learners in each group. At this stage do not worry too much about gender, personality, friendship or ability mix, these are all variables that affect the results but will be discussed later.

Select two groups within each of these classes for case studies. Remember you will be videoing them, so choose ones with easy visibility to the equipment.

Identify how long the young learners have been learning English as this is obviously another variable.

The young learners in these groups will be presenting their tasks and projects in English. However, the negotiating component of the collaborative process could be accomplished using their first language (L1).

## Techniques and methods

Firstly, collect data from each young learner, to provide you with a baseline of what they can do individually. If they have completed groupwork or individual projects in the past, then this will also add value to your analysis.

Secondly, in order to validate the use of collaborative learning using group work, distribute a questionnaire for peer teachers and secondary teachers in a feeder school nearby, in order to assess their perceptions of the value of group work.

Thirdly, organize the experiment using a case study approach (Wallace 1998:160), selecting two groups in parallel classes. Class 'A' is going to be given a 'treatment' and Class 'B' will provide the 'control'. The treatment group will be given the freedom to choose their topic and the control group will be given the topic framework of the name of the country you are living in.

The data collected from the case studies will consist of three areas: i) learner diary; ii) semi-structured interview; and, iii) self-assessment questionnaire at the end of the project.

Fourthly, video recordings of the case study groups will be taken and data collected analyzed for on and off/task behaviour and responses to semi-structured interview questions.

Fifthly, additional data to be analyzed includes teacher's lesson plans, field notes and excerpts from the teacher's CR diary. This will focus on the implementation of the project, the teacher's perceptions of the young

learner behaviour related to individual tasks and the teacher's perceptions of CR focus question and its development.

Lastly, data from the production tasks used to implement the project should include the sequence of the young learner producing the project and the final project itself.

## Analyzing the data

The issue of reliability and validity (Wallace 1998:36-38) should be considered and attention given to ensure that 'qualitative' data is supported by 'quantitative' data where possible. In order to ensure that the data is both reliable and valid, data should be taken from three perspectives in order to triangulate the results. These could be i) the learner; ii) the researcher; and iii) observed using the video.

- 1 Analyze the feedback from your peer colleagues and feeder secondary schools questionnaire. Do they value collaborative learning? How often do they use groupwork?
- 2 Compare what the young learners did individually and the final project for this CR. Are there any notable differences? Do an error analysis to give you some quantitative data.
- 3 Analyze the self-assessment questionnaire the young learners completed. How do they feel about projectwork? How do they feel about groupwork? Do they want to do more projects? Can they identify topics for future projects?
- 4 Using the video, analyze on/off task behaviour related to individual tasks.

Check with lesson plans and materials distributed. If you do not speak the first language (L1), then get help with translating. Are the young learners using their L1 to discuss the project or gossip? What other behaviour can you observe eg. laughter, wandering around? Can you classify the different types of behaviour? Use the teacher's field notes to see if they agree with the video.

- 5 Analyze the semi-structured interview with the young learners. Did they keep to their original topic? Were all the group members aware of their roles?
- 6 Look at all the tasks used to implement the project. Analyze how they have been completed, as well as the final project. Apply your criterion-referenced assessment to all groups. Are there any notable differences between Class A and B? This is important as there needs to be 'internal validity' (Nunan 1992:17) to your marking scheme, so another teacher could apply it and get the same results.
- 7 In order to ensure 'external validity' (Nunan 1992:17) in your analysis identify the variables in the group eg. gender, personality, ability etc. as these will have had an affect.
- 8 In order to ensure 'internal reliability' (Nunan 1992:17) select a range of data so that different perspectives are covered eg. field notes on the teacher's perception of groups' collaboration and learner diary can be corroborated by analysis from the video recordings.

## Unexpected issues?

Identify anything, which you had not expected. These might affect your CR!

## Some alternatives

Using the above CR procedure, but using different types of projects the following modifications could be made to continue evaluating the research question:-

- groups select own members (friendship groups)
- groups are all given the same topic 'Why English is important?' but can present it in their choice of medium including IT
- giving additional marks for observable on-task behaviour
- no marking criteria and 'free' choice of project
- writing for an audience (creating stories for younger learners)

## Applying the framework

This study, although small-scale, seemed to suggest that it is worthwhile for other teachers to follow up the idea with their own students using a similar format. If more teachers followed the procedure used in this CR and attempted to use the same methods and techniques, a pattern might be seen in the ensuing results. Of course, this would depend on the results being shared.

Collaborative learning in a project context would seem to provide young learners with an environment that enables them to help each other by interacting. There appears to be a strong argument that it also encourages learner

autonomy by promoting responsibility in making choices.

Finally, as a teacher/researcher the responsibility for undertaking CR could be immense. It is very tempting to analyse a large quantity of data that seems to naturally evolve from regular everyday classes, but this appears to confuse the CR question. It is not always a simple matter at the beginning of CR to be clear about what type of method will produce the sought evidence, and therefore experience appears to be a major factor in successful CR implementation. Only by regular small-scale CR projects, in which results are fed back to colleagues and ideally published to be shared by others, can the maximum benefits be achieved.

So if applying the above appeals to you and you would like to know more, please contact me (Wendy Arnold) on [arnoldhk@netvigator.com](mailto:arnoldhk@netvigator.com). I will send you all the tools I used to implement this CR. At this stage, I have not shared the results of my CR, as I do not want to affect your perception before you attempt this CR. But if a few of us in different contexts could follow the same steps, we could publish a joint paper for peer teachers.

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*Wendy Arnold is an English teacher at a local Hong Kong primary school. She has worked there for 10 years. She is particularly interested in using projects and stories as a 'vehicle' in the Garviean sense, to promote learning and motivation.*

# Paper! Companion or Slave?

**Andrew Wright**

*In this session session for Global Issues in Brighton, I tried to show that paper can be used for many useful and interesting ways of communicating and practising language teaching points. The idea that materials and media can be used in a much richer way than we normally assume is of potential importance to materially rich as well as materially poor cultures. In the session I concentrated on the nature and potential of paper. However, the principal of the idea that materials and media are exciting companions rather than dull slaves is crucial to creativity...and is not primarily to do with money!*

## **Full character! Full potential!**

We write on paper everyday...normally from top to bottom. When paper is creased or, worse still, torn, we throw it away. When we can see through it to the other side we express our irritation.

## **Silly and a nuisance**

Whenever anything is silly or a nuisance it is not doing what we want. But it IS showing us its character. Perhaps we can USE paper's translucency and fragility!

## **Not just paper**

Every material and medium has its characteristics which can be seen as good and bad. But the 'bad' characteristics CAN be seen as intriguing and of potential use.

In this article I will concentrate on paper but the same idea can be applied to computers and to DVD players as well as to chalkboards, to stones, to earth and to the sun.

## **Paper and its character**

So lets begin with what are normally seen as its limitations and see how these can be used in a positive way for language teaching.

## **'Problems'**

Thin and translucent. Can be torn, cut, folded. Rubbish paper: strips in printing houses, cardboard rolls, cardboard boxes.

## **Let's use its thinness and translucency!**

OK! Test vocabulary!

Most paper is translucent. Draw a picture on one side of the paper eg a face. Put it against a window. Write the words for the different parts of the face on the other side of the paper.

The students sit, in pairs, facing each other. They hold the paper between them. Student A, with the light behind him/her, looks at the drawing and sees only the drawing. He/she points at the different parts of the face and says the word for them. Student B can see the face and the words and the darkness of

Student A's finger. He/she confirms or rejects the word given by A.

### **Let's use the strips of paper thrown away by printers!**

Do you know that your local printer probably throws away thousands of strips of card every week? They vary in size from a centimeter by a metre to, for example, 10 centimetres by half a metre. In English these strips are called 'off cuts'.

I get all my card for free, from the printer! Card is so thick, and stiff. Ha! Ha! Perfect for durability! Perfect for handling! And, of course, pictures are often printed on card, eg postcards.

### **Simple present habitual**

Take a long strip of paper (about 20 to 30 cms) and glue the ends together in order to make a circle. Write on the paper a sentence which is continuous, for example, describing someone's day and the reference to getting up in the morning following on from going to bed. Pulling the strip through the fingers and reading out the actions again and again expresses, very well, the Present Simple Habitual.

### **Sentence building and pattern practice**

Strips of card (or paper). On each piece write one word big enough to be seen by the class. Place the word cards on your table. Invite individual students to take it in turns to take a card and to stand at the front of the class with it. As the second student joins the first student the class discuss which side of the first student he/she should stand. As more students join the line at the front of the class they can be told to change

positions in order to make up a sentence which is syntactically correct.

This can be made into a team competition in which several teams compete to stand in a correct sequence as quickly as possible. Smaller versions of the word cards can be used by individual students.

Note that small printers often throw away thousands of narrow strips of card. In English these strips are called off cuts.

### **What about rolling and folding paper?**

#### **Present continuous**

Roll a piece of paper into a cylinder and make a telescope. The student with the 'telescope' looks through it at the movements and behaviour of other students and reports what they are doing.

*Who/What can you see?*

*What's he doing?*

#### **Future tense form**

Fold a fortune teller. Children make them all over the world. Open it up and write on each final flap, a sentence referring to the future, making a prediction.

#### **'How far' plus future tense form, present perfect and simple past**

Make a variety of types of paper aeroplane. Mark off meters and half meters across the classroom floor (or playground). The students estimate how far their plane will fly; report how far it has flown and record how far it flew.

*I think it will fly three metres.*

*It has flown two metres.*

*It flew two metres.*

#### **Book making**

An ephemeral, ordinary sheet of paper can be transformed into a book which

suggests value, and continuity of pleasure rather than written, corrected, abandoned. A book also suggests quality and implies social significance. I have never had to urge students to do their best when they have been working on a book.

### **Class text book**

The teacher can make a class text book using A2 size paper. The individual students can make their version of the class textbook.

### **Folding cards**

#### **Past tense forms: simple past and present perfect continuous**

A piece of card about 40 cms by 10 cms. The first quarter has a clock drawn on it. The middle half has an action drawn on it. The last quarter has a clock drawn on it.

1 Show the middle half picture of an action. *What's he doing? He's swimming.*

2 Open out the first quarter of the card with the first clock. Look at your own watch and say: *He has been swimming since 10 am.*

3 Now look at your watch. *He has been swimming since 10 am and it is now 11.30 am. He has been swimming for 90 minutes.*

4 Now open the last quarter of the card and show the second clock. The picture of swimming is now bound by two clocks. *He swam from 10 am to 12 am. He swam for two hours.*

*Note: There are many ways of folding cards in order to practice language points. If you want to see more examples then check out my book, Pictures for Language Learning. Cambridge University Press.*

### **How about crumpling paper?**

#### **Reading: search for meaning and syntax**

Write a text about half a page of A4 and use quite large letters eg 16 point.

Copy it either by photocopying or through students making copies for you.

Scrumble each paper into a ball so that each scumbled ball shows different parts of the text. Place the balls of text on a table.

The students work in pairs. Student A examines each ball of paper and reports back to Student B who writes down what Student A dictates.

#### **You can pierce card with a pin!**

#### **Testing vocabulary**

A picture postcard. Pierce with a pin each object within the picture which the students can name (any descriptive word or phrase). Write on the other side of the card, the appropriate word or phrase.

The students sit in pairs facing each other. They hold the card between them. Student A with the light behind him looks at the card and sees only the picture. He/she points at the different parts of the picture and says the word for them. Student B can see the picture and the words and the darkness of Student A's finger as it covers the pin prick hole. He/she confirms or rejects the word.

Instead of a picture you can put the English word on one side of the card and a definition directly on the other side.

#### **What can you do with a long cardboard tube?**

Rubbish bins are stuffed with cardboard rolls! Who wants them? Nobody! The bins are full of them!

### **Sentence patterns**

Wrap strips of paper around a card board roll. On each strip write examples of the words which can occur at that position within a sentence. It is similar to wrapping a traditional sentence pattern table around the roll. The students turn the papers round the roll and create as many sentences as they can which make sense of which are funny and make nonsense. They copy them out.

### **Numbers plus general oral fluency**

Ask a student to step on and off a chair. After 30 seconds, stop the student and place a cardboard roll to the centre of the students chest in order to hear the beat of his or her heart. Count and record the number of beats per minute.

Use various tense forms to direct and comment on, this operation.

Alternatively, call out things to make him or her excited! And ask the listener using the cardboard tube to listen and report if his/her heartbeat does change.

I have tried to offer two principles which might help you to generate new topics and activities:

1 Whatever is interesting and involves language is, potentially, language learning material...even a pile of stones...even the sunlight.

2 The media and materials around us have a much wider potential than we use them for.

Indeed we view some characteristics negatively because they are not relevant to what we want to do with the material, but it is often these characteristics which can lead us to other ideas for using the media or material.

Don't be disappointed if you can't suddenly generate new activities! I suggest you just keep the concept in mind. Keep one eye open. Slowly your collection of activities will begin to build up. I hope you have found these ideas useful.

*Andrew Wright is an author, illustrator, storyteller and teacher trainer. As an author he has published with Cambridge University Press, for example, Games for Language Learning, with Oxford University Press, for example, Creating Stories with Children, Longman, for example, 1000 Pictures for Teachers to Copy. As a teacher trainer he has worked in over 30 countries.*

Email: [andrew@ili.hu](mailto:andrew@ili.hu)

Web page: [www.teachertraining.hu](http://www.teachertraining.hu)

# Amazing Young Minds 2003

## Enric Vidal Roda

The Amazing Young Minds Forum was truly a fascinating experience. Pearson Longman invited thirty-eight EFL primary school teachers and teacher trainers from all over the world to spend six marvellous days at Lucy Cavendish College Cambridge. The aim of the meeting was to create a global network of communication for teachers willing to share their teaching practice and provide valuable feedback on the challenges we face in the classroom.

Taking part in Amazing Young Minds was really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. As teachers we have such a time-consuming job that we find it hard sometimes to detach ourselves from reality to analyse how we are teaching. The Amazing Young Minds Forum provided me with the time and the tools I needed to reflect on my job.

It is always enriching to talk to people from different parts of the world, to learn about the way English is taught across countries and the role English plays in foreign national curricula. Thanks to Pearson Longman we also gained real insight into the complexities of ELT publishing. The visit to Pearson Longman premises in Harlow taught me that creating an ELT textbook is an intricate process in which publishers try to meet the sometimes conflicting demands of teachers, students, ministries, trends, tastes and many other factors. During the Forum we had the golden opportunity to discuss all these matters and many, many others.

The Forum seminars and workshops were also very interesting. On the first

day, after a Getting-to-know-each-other session, Annie Hughes told us about the different theories that linguists have formulated throughout history to account for L1 and L2 learning. This introductory session turned out to be very useful because it provided the theoretical framework for some of the subsequent discussions of the Forum.

Maria José Lobo gave an inspiring talk about the approaches and attitudes that any primary school teacher should adopt to teach successfully. In the session *Clothes for the Naked Teacher*, Nick Dawson invited us to consider the variety of materials that teachers may use. Jean Aitchison gave an illuminating lecture on the stages of language acquisition. Wendy Scott stressed the importance of topic-based teaching to make learning a meaningful process. With Heide Niemann we learned storytelling techniques to liven up our young learners lessons. Finally Shelagh Rixon clarified the key concepts of effective testing. These exceptional lecturers encouraged us at all times to contribute to the sessions with our comments, suggestions and experiences, turning each topic into a real international forum of communication.

Apart from these sessions, the Amazing Young Minds Forum gave us time to socialise and enjoy ourselves. I will never forget the evening barbecue with a live jazz trio, the magnificent gala dinner at Corpus Cristi College Cambridge, or even punting down the river Cam!

One of the most remarkable facts about the Forum was the congenial

# Whole Language Learning and Primary English Coursebooks

**Maria Georgieva**

The complexity of modern life has laid an impact on current educational values conducive to a paradigm shift in which FL learning plays a major part. To meet the expectations of modern, high-tech driven societies educational systems today have laid greater emphasis on foreign language learning and intercultural communication, on versatility of knowledge and competencies, on creative self-expression and connectivity of learning with the whole of life.

The new educational context has faced TEFL specialists, as major players in the educational reform, with the challenge to search for novel ways of effective translation of modern social ideals into concrete practical decisions. Given their central place in the FL classroom, coursebooks can exert a large-scale influence on language teaching, which makes them a most appropriate means of promotion of innovative ideas.

## **The Whole Language Learning Philosophy**

Whole Language Learning (WLL) is a philosophy which stresses that children can learn a language more proficiently if they learn it not through carefully selected and neatly ordered sequences of structures but through whole learning experiences relevant to children's own lives, that will enable them to take advantage of their congenital ability to understand situations more quickly than they

understand language. Built upon research on first language acquisition the WLL movement proclaims a model of teaching based upon whole events, representing coherent samples of natural language use in stimulating contexts of learning, that stir children's curiosity about other peoples and cultures and challenge them to participate actively in natural, meaning-focused communication corresponding to their specific interests, cultural beliefs and abilities.

The WLL principle of teaching language in the context of its use provides children with an opportunity to formulate hypotheses, to make connections with available knowledge across subject areas and build expectations about the language they are learning, without direct instruction about the bits and pieces it is made of. Driven by the belief that children are capable of coping with fuzzier, less structured content WLL models lay emphasis on students' specific interests and abilities with the aim to empower them with greater responsibility for their own learning through developing in them useful strategies of learning and communication. Skills are developed integratively through content-based or problem-solving tasks in which students naturally glide from one skill to another while involved in meaningful communicative experiences.

atmosphere that the organisers created, which paved the way for the real exchange of ideas. I met teachers from all over the world, teachers who operate in very different environments, but deep down I realise that no matter where we are based, as teachers we always face the same challenges worldwide. And sharing our challenges and problems as we did in the Forum is a major step forward in trying to come up with interesting solutions.

I am very grateful to Pearson Longman for such kind invitation. The memory of the days spent at Lucy Cavendish College will certainly inspire my teaching in the future.

*Enric Vidal Roda is Language Coordinator at the Colegio Bell Lloc Del Pla, Girona, Spain*

You can find out more about Amazing Young Minds at the teacher development site [www.eltforum.com](http://www.eltforum.com):

- Download your free copy of the Forum Papers
- Join the online chat about teaching young learners with Jeremy Harmer and Annie Hughes, 27<sup>th</sup> November 6pm GMT



Punting in the rain at the Amazing Young Minds Forum!

# Whole Language Learning and Primary English Coursebooks

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## **WLL and early EFL learning**

With its emphasis on connectivity in language, on integrated, experience-based teaching and students' faculty for constructing their own knowledge, WLL is consistent with modern educational ideals and has, consequently, become more attractive to TEFL teachers. Yet, it should be borne in mind that WLL philosophy has emerged from a paradigm shift in first language literacy development whereby it seems unwise to carry it over uncritically into a FL learning situation. To put it another way, before embracing the WLL "faith" we need to establish whether, and to what extent, it would fit a formal EFL classroom, and whether, or in what respect, it is better than other approaches. These are serious questions that require investigation well beyond the scope of this paper.

The aim here is, on the basis of my experience as a writer of English textbooks for Bulgarian primary students, to provide a set of suggestions on how WLL principles can be effectively incorporated in a communicatively oriented textbook syllabus, to provide for children's propensity for naturalistic FL learning.

We all know from experience that children have an enormous capacity for acquiring a foreign language naturalistically when placed in an appropriate, language-rich environment allowing for communicative events to be perceived in their meaningful wholeness. With the fast spread of English through the electronic media, children's opportunities of picking up English in a non-native environment have grown significantly. Indeed, it is not infrequent today to meet children in Bulgaria, and I believe in other

countries as well, who are able to understand, and even 'speak', some English without having been exposed to any formal teaching, relying solely on chunks of language picked up from computer games, TV or video films. This is commonly accounted for by children's natural inclination to approach communicative events through meaning. By mapping out a FL communicative event according to scripts and schemas drawn upon their L1 communicative experience, they manage to grasp the general idea of the unfamiliar experience and even pick up some chunks of language whose communicative function is easily discernible. Subsequently, when involved in a similar communicative event they readily employ the acquired phrases for their own communicative purposes.

## **Incorporation of WLL features in Primary EFL Coursebooks**

Children's capability to acquire foreign languages naturalistically may be considered a strong enough argument to justify the application of WLL principles in the design of primary English coursebooks. The incorporation of a new philosophy, however, may prove quite a tall order if, as is the case in Bulgaria, textbook writers are constrained by the need to follow a national syllabus specifying in fairly rigid terms the approach, aims, objectives and even language content of EFL courses. Fortunately, there is always room for flexibility in the way topics are presented, in the selection of learning experiences, language and culture samples or types of activities and tasks. So in the last part of this paper I shall suggest some ideas on how WLL features can be employed in the design of primary EFL coursebooks.

In the first place, a WLL perspective would require that topics be presented through experiences bearing most closely on children's life and perception of the world around them. This will enable students to avail freely of their background knowledge, to make connections with available social models, to use to advantage views and values shaped by their own community, family or peer group. To put it another way, students should be able to perceive the language-learning situation created on each topic as a familiar game played in a new place that challenges them to participate actively in the formation of their knowledge. The topics should unfold naturally like coherent whole events built of activities, tying in a natural, logical wholeness information, skills or strategies drawn upon different subject areas enabling students to acquire new vocabulary and structures through meaningful experiences and associations with prior knowledge. This will strengthen their feeling of security and usefulness of what they are learning.

The learning experiences should provide maximum lifelike exposure to the language that is being learnt that would make students aware of its communicative function and challenge them to pick up phrases of real language use in a naturalistic way. Special attention should be paid to the variety and authenticity of text types to satisfy students' varied communicative needs. Text tasks should be of a kind that will make students feel that language is used to say things to each other, to express feelings and attitudes and not just to fill in gaps or judge what is correct or wrong.

Tasks and activities should be placed in a context that appears realistic and relevant to students.

Action games, experiential, or exploratory tasks that challenge children to think, to discover, to test hypotheses and manifest their varied interests and talents provide a much more meaningful context for communication and creative use of language than mere rote learning and reproduction of texts.

Students' awareness of other cultures should be raised by involving them in meaningful cultural experiences rather than by presenting dry facts to them. A lesson describing 'Big Ben', for example, impressive as this London site might be, can hardly inspire lively talk. On the other hand, if involved in the making of something that has cultural significance, or in the reconstruction of a cultural ritual, students could relate the experience to what they do at home, to their own cultural traditions and would be stimulated to fit the new experience in their personal picture of the world.

It would be a mistake to consider the introduction of WLL elements as a way of circumventing grammar. Grammatical awareness is indispensable for children to be able to build the system of the language they are learning and every coursebook writer knows this. To teach grammar holistically, in turn, means to provide students with opportunities to acquire grammatical features naturally through meaning and function. This can be achieved by introducing grammatical features through ready-made patterns in meaningful contexts that students can memorize as wholes and use to perform communicative functions that are important to them in real communication. Problem-solving tasks and other discovery strategies may aptly be used to encourage students to focus attention to the new feature that is being acquired.

It is often argued that there is really no single approach or method that is effective with children. In this sense the ideas presented here make no claim to resolve all the complexities bearing on early TEFL learning but may serve as a valuable resource for enhancement of the methods and strategies currently in use in primary English textbooks that can make learning more meaningful and enjoyable to children.

*Maria Georgieva, PhD, is currently Associate Professor in the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Her research interests are in the field of AL, SLA and ELT Methodology. Author of monographs, articles, educational materials and over a dozen textbooks for Bulgarian primary and secondary students.*

## IATEFL Young Learners SIG Web Sites

**Did you know that IATEFL Young Learners SIG has two web sites, including one with brilliant content exclusively for members? These are:**

- The Discussion List web site at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/> This contains an archive of all messages sent to the Young Learners SIG discussion list. If you want to join the discussions, send an email to [younglearners-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:younglearners-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) You don't need to access the web site to join discussions; everything can be done by email.
- [www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm](http://www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm) This is the 'shop window' for Young Learners SIG. It contains information about what we do, about future events, information about joining and an extensive list of web resources relating to the teaching of English to young learners. There is also a 'members only' section containing downloadable newsletter articles and a large and growing list of discussion summaries. These reflect the thinking of academics and practitioners on a wide variety of current issues regarding the teaching of English to young learners. It's a fabulous resource. If you are a member of the SIG, please do visit. You can get a password at <http://www.countryschool.com/yldoor.htm>

I've recently added an 'Amazon' link to the web resources page at <http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig/> under the 'commercial publishers' section. If you use this to order books not only will you benefit from Amazon's great prices but you will also earn your SIG some commission!

We are currently trialling a promising piece of software called 'Contribute' by Macromedia. This is designed to make it easy for several people to contribute (hence it's name) to a web site. It's about as easy as using Word; in fact any Office document can be easily published to a web site using something called 'Flashpaper.' This loads quickly and looks great. What's more the document can be enlarged on the screen without any loss of quality so it's great for those who need to read bigger print. Technology can sometimes be highly frustrating, but it's great when it works well!

If you like the thought of contributing to the YL web site, 'Contribute' should make it easy for you to do so. I'm thinking in particular of the web resources page at <http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig/> If you'd like to give this a go, please contact me at [etchells@countryschool.com](mailto:etchells@countryschool.com) for further details.

**Chris Etechells**

# English in the Playroom

**Isolde Mayer-Tauschitz**

*This article discusses the possibilities of introducing English as a foreign language for children aged three to six within the framework of nursery education. It also attempts to define the principles of a training programme for nursery teachers that meets a high standard in terms of language competence, methods and procedures in the playroom to provide for a successful pedagogic implementation.*

The knowledge of foreign languages today is regarded as a pre-requisite for higher education and good job-opportunities in Austria and in a European Community which is rapidly growing together in all areas of life. As a consequence of these developments, nursery schools in Austria are confronted with demands by parents to introduce English in pre-school education. Parents usually know by intuition, by their knowledge of the child and by drawing from their own experience in life what is good for their children. Thus we should respect their educational wishes, but we should also try to find additional arguments which are less intuitive and informal for introducing English in the early childhood setting.

## **Why English at nursery school?**

In his discussion of the Input Hypothesis Krashen (1985) argues that age is not a relevant factor in second language acquisition. Older learners progress more quickly in early stages because they obtain more 'comprehensible input' due to the fact that they have more experience in the world and are capable of more complex thinking. Younger learners however, do better in the long run because of their 'lower affective filter (...) which gains dramatically in strength at around puberty, a time considered to be a turning point for language acquisition.'

The success of a bilingual programme will depend on a good knowledge of the first language as this provides the child with subject-matter information which, along with the child's 'CALP' (*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*) can be of great help in making English input more comprehensible. This implies that in the monolingual setting instruction should not start before children have a good command of their mother tongue, which would be around four to five years. German however will always remain at the centre of education. At an early age the foreign language can be seen as an opportunity to learn without effort by playing and as a chance to promote tolerance and encourage a sense of worth for those who are different by bringing children in contact with foreign cultures.

It can also be argued that there is 'no evidence to suggest that teaching foreign languages to young children actually produces bad results unless the teachers are untrained and there is no satisfactory resourcing' (Brumfit, 1984). The nursery teacher will therefore have to have a good command of the English (especially as regards pronunciation) to be introduced through games, rhymes, songs, stories and other activities, but also of the 'meta-language' used in everyday situations at nursery.

## **An integrated approach**

Successful integration of English depends on the knowledge of what happens between children in the group. It is something which has to be worked through in the situation where teaching and learning take place (A.Holliday, 1994). Therefore learning should be planned by the nursery teacher or done in co-operation with a native speaker. An appropriate approach should put into practice what has been learned about the group and should therefore be constantly varied, modified and reformulated as a consequence of observing the performance of the children.

In her discussion of early childhood education Tina Bruce (1997) rejects the concept of '*child-centred*' learning because children have to be seen as part of the culture in which they grow up, and they are deeply connected with the people of their immediate environment. She argues that educators and parents have to study the processes which are part of the child's development meticulously to find out about the child's language(s), play and symbolic life, physical, spiritual and moral development, feelings, ideas and relationships. Observation thus becomes the basis for material provision to bring the child and different aspects of knowledge together to facilitate learning by '*supporting and extending*'. One further aspect of learning in early childhood mentioned by Bruce is the child's disposition towards learning. Instruction should build on what the child initiates. (Compare also: Hartmann et.al. 2000)

Planning a programme to integrate English at nursery therefore implies the use of observation and negotiation to choose those children of a group who are ready to learn a foreign language and to work on themes, topics or projects which are rather initiated by children than by learning outcomes planned in advance or the sequence of topics proposed by a coursebook. This also implies that a foreign language programme should be

integrated in the nursery curriculum and thus take care of the children's development and learning, which refers to the whole person and is not split up into subjects as it is at primary school level. In an integrated approach English is not taught in 'discrete' segments, unattached to anything else in the child's environment, as a series of bits of information simply added to what was previously known, because unlike adult learners children themselves are developing as they learn. (I. Mayer-Tauschitz, 1999 )

## **Methods and techniques**

Recent developments in course design have seen a shift from using a particular method as the focal element of a syllabus to using different methods only as a background for instruction and materials design. The so-called name methods such as Silent Way, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, NLP or Natural Approach can all serve this purpose in the nursery setting. They are based on psychological aspects of language learning, are language-learner oriented and tend to be concerned with partial segments of the whole spectrum of learning. (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986). It therefore lies in the responsibility of the educator to adapt methods or select from them what is appropriate or applicable, and to incorporate their ideas into materials and procedures. Two of these methods, namely Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach seem to be most effective in and compatible with the nursery school setting as they are based on a theory of language learning derived from processes in mother-tongue and second-language acquisition in early childhood. Thus they both seem to relate ideally to the objectives of the programme and to the characteristics of the learners.

## **Total Physical Response**

As described by James Asher (1969, in: Richards and Rodgers 1986), Total

Physical Response (TPR) focuses on the co-ordination of speech and action. Second language learning takes place according to the processes in first language acquisition in which children at an early stage respond physically to commands and thus prove comprehension. Comprehension skills are seen as essential by Asher to precede speaking. Learners who are not asked to produce language but only react to language by movement have less stress and develop a positive mood, which is essential for learning. In the teaching situation physical action and activity are mainly elicited by instructions, but they can also be used in combination with other techniques like role plays or storytelling and questions to children. Children internalise the basic rules of the foreign language by exposure to language. Asher does not see a necessity for conversation during early stages as he regards comprehension as the basis for productive skills. He wants communication to be delayed until after 120 (!) hours of instruction.

At nursery school physical movement is seen as one of the main areas of learning, as it provides an opportunity for children to use their bodies to express ideas and feelings. Thus the principles of TPR tie in very well with the developmental processes of children with the effect that they usually enjoy these activities very much. In an integrated approach English can come in whenever these functions are trained. Instructions during a unit in the gym can be given (and initially demonstrated) in the mother tongue and in English alike. New vocabulary can be reinforced by mime, gesture and movement to convey meaning. A storytelling activity, which is accompanied by gesture can be repeated with the children 'performing' while the teacher is telling the story. The understanding of verbs can be introduced, extended and consolidated by asking children to follow commands. A song can be turned into a dance, a jazz-

chant can be accompanied by gesture and movement. Fine motor skills can be trained by giving instructions to work with scissors, pencils and crayons, construction materials or tools. TPR gives the teacher the opportunity to find a balance between 'stirring and settling activities' (Halliwell, 1992:20) which is essential for keeping children interested and engaged.

## The Natural Approach

According to S. Krashen and T. Terrell (1983), principles and practices of the Natural Approach relate to naturalistic second language acquisition in young children who come to a foreign country. Emphasis is placed on exposure to input which enables the learners to go through a period of reception before they start producing language. These principles are based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) which regards the 'Silent Period' as a normal and natural aspect of second language acquisition. '*...Children in a new country, faced with a new language, are silent for a long period of time, their output limited to a set number of memorised phrases and sentences that they hear frequently and whose meanings they do not understand completely. [...] The child, during this time is simply building up competence by listening, via comprehensible input.*' He also argues that the anxiety experienced by adult students about language learning is due to the fact that they are not allowed to go through a silent period in language classes.

The Natural Approach emphasises vocabulary which is seen as the prime component of a language, grammar and structure are not explicitly taught by the teacher as children's cognitive thinking is not sufficiently developed. The method works with pictures, realia, gestures and mime to facilitate comprehension. Language materials should refer to the learners' knowledge of the world and should be interesting and challenging. The

level of content should be slightly beyond the learners' present level of competence (i+1) and should allow creativity. The ability to speak 'emerges' in each learner in time. (Compare also: Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

At nursery, there should be sufficient input accompanied by non-verbal support through videos, CDs, realia, and pictures with repetition as in important element. We should also bear in mind that it is perfectly natural for children to know a second language and not use it for everyday, real world communication because in the Austrian setting this would seem unnatural. At the early age of four to six children will hardly speak the foreign language, they will listen and absorb it, but they will still be learning. (Brumfit, 1991)

In this context the use of play deserves special emphasis as it is an important setting in which to encourage the 'zone of potential development' which 'defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation.' (Vigotsky, 1978, cited in Bruce, 1997). Bruce argues that 'In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development.' In play children are more likely to use the foreign language naturally and thus can be prepared for real-world communication. This especially applies to the type of role play where language is used creatively.

### Teacher training

The requirements for substantial teacher training in this field are increasingly met by *Colleges for Nursery Education (Bundes-Bildungsanstalten and Kolleges für Kindergartenpädagogik, BAKIP)* in Austria by providing optional courses in

teaching English to the very young. There is also growing interest by local authorities and *Federal Colleges of Education (Pädagogische Akademien)* to provide in-service teacher training programmes for nursery teachers to gain these qualifications. At this point I would like to introduce a curriculum which, at the moment, is the basis of a teacher training programme at *Colleges for Nursery Education* in the province of Upper Austria. It tries to find a balance between the requirements of the nursery curriculum and the principles of learning a foreign language at an early age.

### Curriculum for teaching English at nursery

#### Objectives

By the end of this course nursery school teachers / trainees will:

- be able to define their context of work
- be able to understand how learning English is related to the development of children's thinking
- know about different methods for teaching English to very young learners
- be able to plan work in English by integrating activities into themes and topics provided by the curriculum for nursery schools or vice versa
- have built up their own resource bank of tasks and activities to promote listening and speaking skills as well as work on vocabulary and selected aspects of grammar (e.g. question-answer patterns, following instructions)
- have an understanding of how to cope with errors and correction to provide for a positive atmosphere without any pressure to enable children to learn the language in a natural way which is motivating and makes fun
- have improved their own competence of English in listening, speaking and storytelling, with special emphasis on

the pronunciation of sounds, word stress, rhythm and intonation patterns

## Topics

- Analysis and description of the context of work (Why English at nursery?)
- Integrating language learning and other areas of the nursery curriculum- planning English activities and creating materials
- How to start a programme - covers expectations of children, parents and the nursery teacher, group-formation activities, the use of signposts and symbols
- Information for parents, parental partnership, integrating native speakers
- The principles of TPR - Total Physical Response (e.g. learning through physical movement, dance and games)
- Presenting new vocabulary using visuals, puppets, CDs, videos and other teaching aids
- Some basic pronunciation exercises for children - integrating these into rhymes, creating rhymes with/for children
- Revising vocabulary - special activities and games
- The principles of activity-based learning - learning by doing
- Using songs, chants and rhymes in English
- Arts and crafts activities, preparing food with children – following instructions
- Storytelling at nursery - selecting and adapting stories, presenting stories to the group by reading or telling them, the use of video and CD; extending through games and role play
- Group management and organisation of the room, the use of meta-language (classroom language) and time management
- Errors and correction, how to deal with 'the silent period'
- Observing, monitoring and evaluating children's learning - keeping records
- Introduction to specialised literature, teaching programmes, materials and story books.

## Methods of learning

Mini lectures, discussions, group work, workshops, peer teaching, independent study, observation and practical work with children at nursery. The training of pronunciation is seen as an overall principle which is integrated whenever this makes sense. Teachers who need more intense training are encouraged to work in the language lab.

## Timetable

The course is designed to be taught to final-year- students at the *BAKIP* or students at the *Kolleg* in two units per week for two semesters. This includes the basic course and several units of observation and teaching at nursery.

## Assessment and qualification

Students write one assignment per semester which is integrated in the final mark for the school report/diploma. Local authorities increasingly regard the course as special or additional qualification which increases chances on the job market.

The Curriculum can be adapted to be offered as an in-service training course for nursery teachers by arranging the syllabus in modules with practical experience at nursery gained simultaneously. It ideally will be designed as certificate course to support the professional development of nursery teachers.

In this article I have tried to define some of the most important issues of designing a teacher training programme for English at nursery. As responsibility for an early involvement of our children in English language learning lies in the hands of nursery school teachers, they have to be able to formulate objectives which take care of the specific educational context at nursery schools and present English activities in a structured way - at the same

time allowing children to initiate learning situations and to show creativity and spontaneity.

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*Isolde Mayer-Tauschitz has taught English and German at different secondary training colleges. At present she is teaching at the College for Nursery Education (Bundes-Bildungsanstalt und Kolleg für Kindergartenpädagogik, Honauerstraße 24, 4020 Linz) and at the In-Service Teacher Training College (Pädagogische Institut des Bundes in OÖ). She holds the MA TESOL of the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.*

[i.mayer-tauschitz@eduhi.at](mailto:i.mayer-tauschitz@eduhi.at)

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# Project-based Writing for Young Learners

Fran Gamboa & Caroline Linse

## What is project-based learning?

Project-based learning helps pupils develop a wide range of skills by studying a topic at length. Pupils who do a project and spend several weeks studying a theme, such as the Solar System, will learn a great deal about stars, planets and language. The project approach gives pupils an opportunity to explore the content in depth while at the same time developing all four language skill areas.

With a little bit of thought, teachers can provide meaningful writing experiences incorporated within the project. The writing activities can be as simple as creating a credit card for a project about shopping or as involved as creating a series of books on different dog breeds for a project on pets.

## How to go about it

The first step is to think about the environmental print and other pieces of written text which are naturally associated with the project. It is important to consider the print that one would find in an English speaking environment, if one were to explore the theme there. For a project about the supermarket, the environmental print would be the signs found in the supermarket as well as the labels on food and other packages. There might also be supermarket advertising supplements filled with print.

Once the types of text which would fit into the unit have been identified, the teacher needs to provide written language models for children to follow so that they can create their own pieces of writing.

Prewriting and writing activities can be integrated into projects for children as young as four years of age. Preschoolers, in Mexico, who were learning about feelings read different books as a way to explore the topic. They also talked about feelings and did role-play about feelings. Then they wrote their own book using a predictable format:

*I feel excited when.....*

The children merely had to complete the sentence with their own words. The teacher wrote down the children's words and each individual child illustrated his or her picture, for example:

*I feel excited when I go to the movies.*

When kindergarten children in Mexico did a project on folktales, their teacher read the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. The teacher queried the children about appropriate ways that the pigs could react to the wolf. The children who had learned about letter writing in a previous project, decided that the best way to "to talk" to Mr. Wolf would be through letters. The school director assumed the role of the wolf and the children assumed the role of the pigs. The wolf and the pigs wrote letters back and forth. Their letters were a written dialogue that took the form of a cat and mouse style chase. The children knew that this was make-believe but nevertheless found it to be engaging.

When nine and ten year olds, in Belarus, completed a project on life in English speaking countries, they decided to create their own weekend, newspaper-style magazine. The pupils included information

about different tourist destinations in Britain as well as articles about famous musicians. They also illustrated their magazine with brightly colored drawings.

## **Conclusion**

Meaningful writing experiences can be created to accompany almost any project. The key is to determine what pieces of writing would best fit into the project. With a little bit of effort pupils can create

wonderful pieces of writing and more importantly they won't even know that they are learning in the process.

*Fran Gamboa is the principal of the Early Childhood Centre at the American School Foundation, in Mexico City, Mexico.*

*Caroline Linse is a Fulbright visiting lecturer at Minsk State Linguistic University in Minsk, Belarus.*

Joint conference supported by IATEFL YL SIG, International Youth Library, Munich, University of Munich, London Metropolitan University, REALBook News

# **Using Picture Books to Support Early English Language Acquisition**

**Friday 19 November - Sunday 21 November 2004**

**International Youth Library, Schloss Blutenburg, Munich. Germany**

Picture Books should have a place in children's cultural experience. In becoming part of early English as a foreign language experiences, Picture Books not only contribute to language acquisition but to young children's all-round development and enjoyment too. What children have picked up in reading well-selected English language picture books influences their literacy and learning in their home language. It also contributes to building up positive life-long attitudes to reading and loving books.

This Conference - the first of its kind - will be based on

Methodology

Results of recent research

Aspects of writing, illustrating and publishing

Practical approaches

Apart from well-known authors and illustrators, as well as professionals in the field, participants will be given time to share their favourite Picture Book explaining how they used it and what the children achieved.

Further Information from Janet Enever, Opal Dunn and Leonora Froehlich Ward:  
[office@picturebooks.org](mailto:office@picturebooks.org)

# Highlights from the Young Learner Internet Discussion List

Wendy Arnold

Let me briefly introduce myself. I am Wendy Arnold and I have lived and taught in Hong Kong for the past 12 years.

Beatriz Lupiano, our previous discussion list facilitator introduced the following topics:

- ◆ Games for teaching YLs at different levels
- ◆ Cooking with YLs
- ◆ Native vs non-native English teachers – pros and cons
- ◆ Suggestions for coursebooks for YLs
- ◆ Grammar and YLs

Chris Etchells (YL SIG Website Manager) then introduced a discussion on *'How appropriate is introducing target language cultural awareness at very early levels of primary school?'*

This topic took us into various aspects eg.

- ❖ non-native English teachers introducing Western culture using English but not understanding the connotations, such as Halloween
- ❖ the importance of English teachers (who are not of the same culture as their students) having an awareness of cultural perceptions, such as in China bear, snake and frog could be considered farm animals;

- ❖ a suggestion that culture could be introduced by first exploring the traditions of the learners and then of English speaking countries;
- ❖ an argument that 'the younger the better' for introducing cultural differences;
- ❖ that culture includes the characteristics of the country, including food, clothes etc. and these should be included.

I took over as discussion list facilitator from Beatriz at the end of January 03, and a brief overview of some of the discussions since then includes:

- whether learners of English who have a non-Roman writing in L1 have more problems to learn English than those with alphabet/Roman script learners?
- questioning what exactly is comprehensible input for our YLs? Do we need NOT to be afraid of using 'pidgin' which could also be compared to motherese / foreignese, to help our YLs process input?
- reducing the stress of learning English by considering what activities YLs enjoy which have a positive output eg. songs, games, and also asking YLs themselves what they think helps them to recall?;
- developing a bibliography/reference list of practical resources eg. activities, games, songs; design of

courses/syllabus; teacher training, learning strategies etc.

- identifying English Language Teaching organizations worldwide;
- identifying strategies and techniques for classroom discipline and compiling a list;
- using 'real' books to either replace a coursebook or supplement them
- developing a primary course from a teacher trainer perspective
- a 'wish list' of what should be included in a teacher training course from a trainee teachers perspective.

The space limitations do not allow me to develop all of these discussions (which can be followed on our yahoo site anyway) but I will choose a couple to show examples of input from some of our members.

### **Strategies and techniques for classroom discipline**

We had suggestions from 11 members which ranged from:-

- Gordon Lewis – 'being well prepared'
- Lucy Mellersh – 'be strict from the start'
- Denise Hannaoui – 'giving stickers as rewards for children who raise their hands, use good listening skills, or are modeling appropriate behavior'
- Chris Etchells – 'expect the very highest standards from each child'
- Ruth Benvegner – 'never allowing ourselves to shout'
- Helen Doron – 'cater for the different learning styles in the group'
- Debra Smowton - the teacher 'having the courage to wait for silence'

- Harpreet Kaur – 'play/quiz or any competitive contest which officially allows them to interact with each other during the lesson'
- Wendy Superfine – 'children feel more secure in a disciplined and structured environment'
- Gail Ellis – 'respecting cultural differences - be sensitive to childrens' expectations of how they consider a teacher should behave and how they expect a lesson to be conducted and use a methodology that is appropriate and effective for the local context and cognitive stage of the pupils'
- Wendy Arnold – 'not giving up, if one strategy doesn't work, then keep trying.'

### **The use of stories in EFL/ESL**

The topic on coursebooks sidetracked onto using stories or 'real' books which promoted a very lively discussion. The range of ideas varied from:

- Sandie Mourao defining what 'real books' meant. Read the discussions as the interpretations are not definitive!;
- Livia Farago who collaboratively writes a story with her YL during the lessons and then uses their story as linguistic input for 'noticing' syntax, structure, verbs etc;
- Eleanor Watts cautioning that using 'real books' can be expensive and maybe not an option for 'low-resourced' contexts and emphasising the importance of being aware of socio-cultural differences, as some stories might be offensive;
- Wendy Superfine describing how she gets trainee teachers to develop tasks around a story as part of her teacher training workshops;

- Janet Enever suggesting that there is a need to need to integrate 'intercultural awareness and visual literacy';
- Wendy Superfine shared a grid identifying the topic and language content of 10 stories;
- Gail Ellis shared a 'teacher support for story-based work' grid identifying approach, learning opportunities for YLs and support available for teachers;
- Carol Read shared her experiences of researching and writing a course based entirely on stories for very young learners and identified some of the features of the genre of stories specially written for this group;
- Opal Dunn cautioning that 'the secret for success is in the selection of the right 'real' book.

Using stories may not be a panacea in itself, but should be viewed as a viable approach which seems to motivate YLs.

I have not given you too many details, as the hope is that you will be inspired and motivated enough to visit our resource site and explore our discussions yourself. These discussions are not static, they are organic and if there is anything you would like to add to any of them just make sure that you use the same subject reference and add your views! The summaries and lists are on-going and can be modified as we go along. As we all know, nothing stands still in teaching and it would be very interesting to keep developing topics, which are relevant to us all.

We have also invited four 'experts' to field discussions in the new academic year. Details can be seen on adjacent page.

Please do feel free to join our YL SIG discussion group. You can see summaries at <http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig/summary0.htm> or for blow by blow details follow the thread (see the subject) by following this link to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/join> . If you are already a yahoo group member follow the instructions on the right and go straight in, if you do not yet have a yahoo account, follow the instructions to the left.

*Wendy Arnold lives and works in Hong Kong as an EFL teacher. She completed her MA in TEYL at York where she developed an interest in the use of projects and stories for teaching English. Wendy is the YL SIG Discussion Group Moderator.*

IATEFL Young Learners special interest group (YL sig)  
FUTURE DISCUSSION FIELDERS 2003 – 2004  
SEMESTER 1



1 – 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2003

**TOPIC 1 for discussion:**

**"Meeting the individual needs of young learners:  
how much differentiation in approach is really  
possible in the classroom?"**

**ABOUT discussion fielder 1**

**Peter Westwood** is an Associate Professor in Special Education at the University of Hong Kong. He has been involved in education as a teacher, psychologist, lecturer and administrator for 45 years, working in England, various states in Australia, and most recently Hong Kong. His research and writing interests focus on students with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy, teacher competencies, curriculum adaptation, and instructional design. He is the author of '*Commonsense methods for children with special educational needs*' (Routledge-Falmer, 4th ed. 2003), '*Spelling: approaches to teaching and assessment*' (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999) and '*Reading and learning difficulties*' (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2001).

23 – 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2004

***TOPIC 2 for discussion: log in to find out!***



**About discussion fielder 2:**

**Annie Hughes** is the Assistant Director of the EFL Unit, University of York and Director of the MA in TEYL, a distance MA. She is a trainer, trainer, teacher trainer and consultant for EYL projects worldwide. She was a member of the UCLES working party that created the CELTYL and the British Council Working Party on Teaching English to Young Learners. She was IATEFL Sig coordinator for 4 years. Annie is co-author of Carousel 1 & 2 (Longman), Treasure Trail 3 & 4 (Penguin), 100 Plus Ideas for Children (Heinemann) and author of Carnival of songs (Cornleson) and JET: Songs and Rhymes (Mary Glasgow). She co-created and edited The Penguin Young Readers Series and is the TEYL consultant for the new Usborne ELT series. She has been involved with and directed the annual British Council Summer School for teachers of English to young learners, 1989 -2000, and also directed the British Council Specialist Seminars on Managing Change in TEYL. She is also a TEYL consultant for the BBC World Service.

For details on how to join our discussions visit:

[www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm](http://www.countryschool.com/younglearners.htm)

or

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/join>

**DON'T FORGET!**  
Fielders for SEMESTER 2

March 2004

**Melanie Williams**

and

April 2004

**David Nunan**

# Book Reviews

## **The Longman Children's Picture Dictionary**

With songs and chants by Carolyn  
Graham (2003)

Picture Dictionary

ISBN 962 00 5233 1

Teacher's Resource Book

ISBN 962 00 5316 8

Workbook 1

ISBN 962 00 5317 6

Workbook 2

ISBN 962 00 5318 4

*Reviewed by Eleanor Watts*

This dictionary is designed for young learners new to dictionary work. It contains 800 words or phrases contextualised in 50 topics and ends with an alphabetically arranged index. With it come two workbooks, a teacher's resource book and two CDs.

### **The Dictionary**

The *Longman Children's Picture Dictionary* (2003) is a new dictionary for young children with different features from *The Longman Picture Dictionary* (1993) which is for slightly more advanced children and has 1500 headwords. The new publication has the great advantage of accompanying jazz chants by Carolyn Graham and also of less fussy pictures. The alphabet (which starts both books) is clearer and the letters are not confused with the pictures of their illustrative words. While the 1993 dictionary uses a British English model, the 2003 dictionary uses American English; for example, one of the sample words for

*L* in the first topic is *ladybug* not *ladybird*.

In cultural terms, as ladybugs/birds are unfamiliar to many children outside Europe, this choice of word also serves to illustrate the slight Euro-American bias of the pictures, most of which are set in Anglophone cultures with a few token brown faces. Still, there is a series of beautiful photos of animals from different regions such as African plains, tropical rainforests and polar regions. No picture dictionary can include everything, but I'd also have liked illustrations of food, festivals, clothes and customs of people in non-western parts of the world.

The new version is clearly organised so that each double page spread has a talk-about picture with 15-20 words, an activity, a dialogue (sorry, dialog!) and a song. The same format for each page is preserved throughout the book and this will give security to the unconfident child or teacher and make it easy to use as a dictionary. However, we are told that it could also be used as a course book; in this case the predictability may be a disadvantage. As the main focus is on lexis, grammar is taught orally through the dialogues, but no illustrations help us along with the meaning of structure/function, which would be desirable in a course book. While this gap is, to some extent, filled in the workbooks, neither gives extended reading texts.

Cleverly, more than fifty topics are included by working two topics into one on many pages. For example, *Shape* is combined with *Time* through

pictures of triangular, square and star-shaped clocks. Animal names are revised when different animals play each instrument of the orchestra. An attractive feature of the dictionary is the hidden object for each topic – giving children something to search for as in the *Where's Wally?* books.

### **The CDs**

The CDs will be very useful for teachers who are not fluent in English themselves, providing, as they do, clear spoken models in oral exercises and songs. Again, the model is of American English: we have *tomaydo*, not *tomaato* and *zee*, not *zed*. For each topic, the CD gives all the vocabulary (read unadventurously as a list of the words pictured), the dialogues (slightly dull, but useful as oral substitution tables) and a catchy song or chant by Carolyn Graham. These are sung first and then followed by an instrumental version that can be sung as a karaoke. The songs are great fun and would be useful for any topic work in the primary classroom. The dictionary is worth buying for the CDs alone.

### **The Workbooks**

These are clearly structured and nicely illustrated (in one colour). They give structure, vocabulary and handwriting practice as well as dictionary skills exercises such as arranging words into alphabetical order. An answer key is provided.

### **The Teacher's Resource Book**

This contains over 850 photocopiable flashcards, 27 photocopiable board games, a number of ideas for games and activities and lesson notes for each topic. The board games may be difficult to use with large classes, but

the games are well chosen and the flashcards will save the teacher time.

This package is very carefully designed and the illustrations are both clear and attractive. I doubt whether it would work as a course, as claimed, because there is too great an emphasis on lexis, the layout lacks variety and there are no extended reading passages. However, it will be a very useful supplement to the young learner classroom, particularly for teachers teaching English through topics.

*Eleanor Watts writes primary textbooks and teacher resource books for schools in India and some African countries. She also does freelance teacher training and teaches part time in UK.*

## **Realbooks in the Primary Classroom**

**Sandie Mourão**

Junior English Timesavers  
Scholastic / Mary Glasgow Magazines  
(2003)

*Reviewed by John Clegg*

There should be more stories in primary ELT. Children love listening to them, reading them, talking and writing about them. They are therefore a huge motivator for using and learning a second language. They contain everything second language acquisition theorists would like to see in language learning. They can act as a springboard for all kinds of cross-curricular language use. They reinforce children's ideas of the importance of books in society. They reflect children's emotional and social development and can act as a platform

for moral issues. And there are plenty of good ones on the market. But stories do not feature enough in ELT coursebooks and in my experience as an assessor of short primary ELT training courses, trainers do not always treat storytelling and story-reading as a *sine qua non* in ELT.

*Realbooks in the Primary Classroom* is a book of teachers' notes and photocopiable resources for using children's stories in primary ELT. The notes refer to nine children's books published by Scholastic for ages 3-12. The stories are grouped in sets of 3 for ages 3-6, 7-9, 10-12, but the notes make clear that teachers can use their own judgement about the appropriateness of both stories and activities for ages and language levels. Sandie Mourão is an expert teacher and trainer in primary ELT and members of the IATEFL SIG e-group will recognise her as a constant source of expertise, practical classroom experience and sheer enthusiasm for teaching English to children.

The books themselves are good children's stories, by well-known authors and well-illustrated. Children will like them. They are not written for the ELT classroom; as Sandie is at pains to point out, they are 'real books' and this is one thing which makes them in her view good stories for the ELT classroom. But they have ELT-friendly features such as familiar and motivating subject matter, humour and the fact that the illustrations support the storyline well. Three of them are sturdy board books and two are split-page books with opportunities for weird picture and language combinations and lots of laughs.

The book contains a 7-page introduction to using stories in the ELT classroom, as well as teachers' notes

and photocopiable resources for each story. An age-appropriate self-assessment page is provided at the end of each group of notes. The introduction provides a brief discussion of an appropriate set of topics related to using stories in primary ELT, such as: the issue of 'real books' (see below), the qualities to look for in text and illustrations, storytelling technique and organising the classroom for story books and storytelling. There is also guidance on using the stories themselves, plenty of activities for using both large and small flashcards and instructions for making them.

The teacher's notes for each story contain 4 or 5 pages of teaching suggestions followed by 3 or 4 pages of photocopyables. The notes comprise a brief description of the story detailing, for instance, theme, key language items, repetitive elements and, where appropriate, cultural aspects. The activities are divided into pre-, while- and post-storytelling phases. The 'telling' phase is very detailed with respect to what the teacher might say with reference to each page, how she might say it, gestures she might use and language she might elicit from the children. The post-story phase shows how the story can be a platform for a variety of linked activities, including cross-curricular work. The notes refer to the photocopyables which provide templates for the main activities such as flashcards and mini-books.

The view of stories in primary language-learning which the book presents is informed, practical, positive and eminently accessible to teachers. The introduction makes key pedagogical points briefly and simply – about illustrations, for example (they need to tell the story themselves) or

about grammar (it doesn't matter if stories contain forms which the children cannot yet use productively). Sandie also takes a common-sense view of aspects of practice such as the role of L1 use (it's natural for both teacher and children to use it where necessary or appropriate) or teachers' ability to tell stories (practise it at home – maybe in front of the mirror). The book is very clear: this applies both to classroom procedures and to the process of making materials: we see exactly what to do. Throughout the book, children are at the centre of the lesson and wholly involved in the activities, including the making of materials. They are also regularly engaged in composing and publishing their own books: so they see value of books not only through listening to good stories and reading fine books, but also in creating their own. The activities are eminently interesting, generate good language development and are fun to do.

### **'Real books'**

The book refers explicitly to the concept of 'real books' and to the important work of Opal Dunn (though, for example, *Realbook News*) in making the idea a key part of primary ELT practice. This concept is also one which has generated lively discussions on the YL SIG e-group and it invites comment. As I understand it, the idea is that books written by children's book authors for native speakers are especially valuable in primary ELT reading and language development. Sandie mentions several features which confer on 'real books' this special value. They are, for example, written solely for children's enjoyment (as opposed to language development), they are often beautifully illustrated, the quality of the story is especially motivating and in particular they avoid

controlled language which is a cornerstone of most primary ELT publications.

I wholly agree that the kind of book which this collection exemplifies is very good for primary ELT. The same is true of Opal Dunn's 'real books' – and indeed of the 'real' stories in other primary ELT story publications (e.g. Ellis and Brewster 2002). But I suspect that what makes these books interesting to children is not that they are written for native-speakers. It is firstly a quality intrinsic to the story – something which I wouldn't like to define, but which must have to do with emotion, topic, story structure, suspense, repetition and language choice; and secondly a presentational quality to do with textual simplicity, the relation of text to visuals, and especially the quality of illustration and design. Stories written by ELT writers can also have all these features, even those with a degree of unobtrusive language control. The problem with ELT reading material – especially when attached to courses – is not so much that it may be too language-controlled, but that it may not achieve these intrinsic story and presentational values which make the books in this selection so appealing.

There are a few things I miss in this book. There is very little on the role of self-access listening activities for children to do after storytelling, e.g. listening to the story again on cassette/disk and using a lot of the activities again. In addition, I personally like to see ELT as a contributor to subject and cognitive development and would have liked to see more of this arising naturally from the text in the post-storytelling phase. Sandie exemplifies this very well in story 5 but it would have been good to see more of it. I also think the range of

reading/listening-orientated activity types could be a bit wider – to include, perhaps, charts, heads and tails, word/sentence- and picture-matching and sequencing. It would have been good to have something on the role of parents in ELT reading. And finally a short bibliography on ELT reading and ‘real books’ would have been useful – there is a textual reference to Opal Dunn in the introduction without a corresponding bibliographical entry.

However, these are niggles. Teachers will like this book, and their children will like the stories. Sandie understands the ELT classroom very well; she conveys a proper sense of how important stories are for children’s learning and teachers will find her infectious enthusiasm catching.

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*John Clegg is an education consultant based in London. He works with teachers who teach the primary and secondary curriculum through the medium of English in multicultural schools in the UK, bilingual schools in Europe and English-medium schools in Africa.*

## Telling Tales in English

Wendy Superfine and Megan James

DELTA Publishing 2003  
ISBN 9 781900 783491

*Reviewed by Niki Joseph*

It’s September again and the new school year for the northern hemisphere has just begun. I wonder how many teachers are planning on using stories in their classes this year.

If you are one of them then this book will certainly help you!

Six ‘well-known and much loved’ (*from the back cover*) stories have been chosen and are each exploited in 5 lessons. There is also a cassette available which includes all the stories, listening texts, songs and chants.

In the introduction there is a very useful brief synopsis of the stories and activities. This means that you can very quickly see what the story is about, the language focus and the activities – e.g. if it’s bingo, or a puppet play etc. For the busy teacher this is just great. This is in part a repetition of the contents page – the only difference here being that you have a synopsis of the story.

The introduction is short and concise which is entirely suitable for this type of book. With bullet points to aid clarity the reader is informed of the value of photocopiable materials, using stories in the EFL classroom, traditional and folk tales, and how to choose a story. I found this informative and was surprised to learn that *‘It is necessary for 75% of the language to be understood by the class. The remaining 25% of the language will provide exposure to new vocabulary and structures.’* It makes sense but when presented in figures seems a huge amount that children should already know!

The book is divided into the 6 stories and each contains the Story Text, 5 photocopiable lessons and 5 pages of accompanying Teacher’s notes. The stories are presented in a variety of ways – dialogue, narrative, combo of dialogue and narrative and others. Each story has a language focus and this is all clearly set out on the contents page. Telling the tale is obviously going to be done from the book and it

is a shame that some key vocabulary items are not included as A4-size photocopyables for the teacher to colour. As it stands there is no colour and that is the major weakness of this book.

There are some really nice, feasible activities. The first story is the Leopard's Drum. This is a story from West Africa and is about how the tortoise got her hard shell. The activities chosen are a matching activity (pictures to words), Happy Families, a card guessing game with classroom objects and a shadow puppets activity. Finally the children put on a shadow puppet play. The teachers' notes are very clear and easy to follow - symbols indicate which skill is being practised and icons show whether the main activity focus is individual, pair or group.

The activities are varied and include reading and writing. One story includes book making as the outcome, another has a bar chart following a class survey. This book particularly interests me as it is obviously not for young first year English students. I would use this book with my 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of English students aged 8/9upwards.

The last story is the Pied Piper and I'm looking forward to using this in the next academic year. This story involves the present tenses, the past and the question form *What did...do?*

Lesson 1 introduces the story and with a chant we are told what rats do:

*They fight the dogs  
And scratch the cats etc.*

This is practised with a matching word to picture activity. Lesson 2 is about prepositions of place. i.e. where the rats go. The next 2 lessons practice (or you could be introducing) the past tense. This finally rounds off with the chant in the past tense:

*They fought the dogs  
And scratched the cats etc.*

This appeals as it is controlled past tense introduction but with a suitable context for this age group.

Overall, then I think that this book is going to become a very useful aid to any YL teacher but especially to those with little or no experience of using stories.

*Niki Joseph has worked in Brazil, Italy, Egypt, S Africa and is currently based in Portugal as a free lance teacher and teacher trainer specialising in primary.*

# Letter to the Editor

*From Andrew Wright*

In the Spring 03 issue of CATS, Opal Dunn described her experience of the origin of our YL SIG. All healthy trees should have more than one root and I would like to add my own experience and small contribution to the founding of our YL SIG.

During the IATEFL annual conference in the Netherlands, the year before the launching of YL SIG, I described the idea of SIGS to a large number of colleagues interested in teaching children. I had been to TESOL USA and come across the idea there and it seemed an excellent way of remaining in the larger association but being able to share ideas with like-minded colleagues more easily. Over thirty colleagues signed a sheet of paper to express their interest in forming a SIG for YL in IATEFL. At that time there were no SIGS. I, too, talked to Peter Strevens about it and he said that IATEFL was moving in that direction and that we should submit our proposal in due course. Like Opal, I would like to acknowledge Peter as being a genial and talented man who contributed so much to language teaching in Britain and also in the world as a whole. It was Peter who mid-wifed the SIG notion into being in IATEFL. And it was Opal together with all our other colleagues who provided the roots of our present day YL SIG.

As an early contributor to the SIG, I would like to thank all our colleagues over the years who have given their time and energy and good will to helping our SIG to grow. We all benefit from this unpaid work and so too do our children.

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## FORTHCOMING YL SIG EVENTS 2004

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27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> February

### **Serving TEA to Young Learners**

Joint Conference of Testing Evaluation and Assessment SIG with Young Learners SIG, University of Cyprus, Nicosia

For more information, a speaker proposal form or registration form contact Kari Smith: [kari@oranim.ac.il](mailto:kari@oranim.ac.il)

13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> April

### **38<sup>th</sup> International IATEFL Conference**

The Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, UK

For more information, contact the IATEFL office.

19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November

### **Using Picture Books to Support Early Language Acquisition**

International Youth Library, Schloss Blumenburg, Munich, Germany  
Jointly supported by IATEFL YL SIG; International Youth Library, Munich; University of Munich; London Metropolitan University; REALBook News.

# YOUNG LEARNERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

The Young Learners Special Interest Group was initiated in 1985 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. This year there will be a free publication for all members of IATEFL called **Storytelling in ELT** which will 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.

**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](mailto:generalenquiries@iatefl.org)

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

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

## YL SIG Committee Members

### SIG Co-ordinator

*Sandie Mourão, Portugal*

### Finance and Membership

*Andy Jackson, UK*

### Events Co-ordinators

*Debbie Smith, UK*

*Gordon Lewis, USA*

### YL Web Site Manager

*Christopher Etechells, UK*

### Newsletter Editors

*Carol Read, Spain*

*Kay Bentley, Netherlands*

### Discussion List Moderator

*Wendy Arnold, Hong Kong*

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.

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