



YOUNG LEARNERS

Young Learners Special Interest group Publication (CATS: Children and Teenagers)



Spring 2007 Literacy

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YOUNG LEARNERS SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

The Young Learners Special Interest Group was initiated in 1985 and has now evolved into a flourishing worldwide 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, second and additional language.
- To help teachers and teacher trainers circulate ideas, research findings, 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?

'CATS': The bi-annual publication about teaching EFL/ESL to children and teenagers. It is available online and through the post. 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
- reviews.

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

Conferences and seminars: The SIG has a Young Learner 'Pre-conference event at the annual IATEFL conference. Other UK and international events are often organised in conjunction with other SIG groups. The YL SIG events cover 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:

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Our publication is produced twice a year. We welcome contributions or suggestions for future publications on any aspects of teaching English to Young Learners up to 17 years.

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REPORT FROM THE JOINT COORDINATORS

From a balmy (albeit polluted) Hong Kong and rainy (!) Portugal we bring you good wishes for the New Year and have tremendous enthusiasm that 2007 is going to be a fabulous one! At the time of writing we have only just started the New Year and we have high aims.

ABERDEEN

PCE – Wednesday 18th April - 2007

We are busily working on the nitty gritty necessary behind the scenes for the PCE (pre-conference event) which we are planning for you on the 18th April in Aberdeen. This year we have chosen the topic 'Literacy in ELT: the role of the YL professional in developing reading and writing'. By the time you read this the event will be history, but it is still very much in our minds as we co-ordinate the day and our wonderful team of speakers/presenters and sponsors. This topic in various forms is regularly brought up by our e-members and we hope that we will find some resolution to the various issues which surround them. As one PCE finishes, we will be busily planning the next, so if you have any constructive feedback or suggested topic for 2008, we are all ears.

SIG DAY – Friday 20th April 2007

Each SIG has a day in which workshops are earmarked as being particularly pertinent. This year we have Angela Hasslegreen on the CEF and YL, Teresa Fleta and MI, Maria Rondon and puppets, Jennifer Uhlher on stories, drama and IT, Ardur Torfadottir and learners in Iceland. There is also the Open Forum which you are invited to. There you have the opportunity to meet the committee, hear what we've been doing/planning to do. There will be some great (sur)prises too!!! Come along!

EVENTS

We are also pondering on the dilemma of where, when and which events we can collaborate with to bring you closer to the YL SIG. It is always disappointing to put in a lot of effort and then find that for situations out of our control we have to postpone our intentions. Karen Widl, our very able joint events co-ordinator is working very hard to make events possible near to you and we have considered Sri Lanka, Italy, France and Singapore. At the time of writing we do not have anything concrete confirmed but this is not due to lack of trying. If it is in our power (and financially viable) then we will be there!

SPONSORSHIP

We are also exploring different ways to attract sponsorship to the YL SIG, we cannot survive on membership subscriptions alone, the committee members are volunteers and there are so many things we would like to do with and for our members but are tied by \$\$\$ - such

is the way of the world Gordon Lewis is thinking up ways to develop this aspect of our funding but if you can be of any help please contact him.

MEMBERSHIP

Likewise, Hans Mol is on track to develop our membership, the more the merrier! We hope you'll agree that being a member of a special interest group like ours is valuable CPD (continued professional development). So please help to spread the good word.

VALUE ADDED FOR MEMBERS

Again, we are doing our best to get sponsorship for the CLIL publication (subject of our 2006 PCE) and at the time of writing we are getting this ready for downloading directly from our resources website we're sure it will be ready by the time you read this.

RESOURCES WEBSITE

Again by the time you read this you may have seen our fabulous new website design which Chris Etchells (Website Manager) and Hans Mol (Website Resources Editor) have been beaver away to ensure it is more accessible.

If you have not visited it for a while DO SO - you won't be disappointed.

DISCUSSION LIST

Again at the time of writing we are confirming some of the discussion fielders planned for 2007. This academic year (in the northern hemisphere at least!) we have focused on 4 fielders and topics to develop/give some background to our PCE. This is deliberate but in no way does it mean that other topics are excluded, so if you have a 'burning question' please just dip in and ask! Planned discussions are always surrounded by ad hoc ones, which are just as fascinating!

YL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

If you are interested in joining the YL SIG as a committee member, at the time of writing we are looking for a discussion moderator and an events coordinator. If either of these are of interest to you please ask if the roles are still available!

This is Kerry Powell's first time as editor of CATS and we're sure you'll agree she's done a sterling job!

Thank you for being a member of the YL SIG and we hope that you did remember to come and look us up in Aberdeen!

Wendy Arnold and Niki Joseph
Joint Coordinators

Editorial

Kerry Powell

Welcome to the Spring 2007 issue of the YL SIG CATS publication, and to my first issue as co-editor. I feel very honoured to be part of the YL SIG team working alongside Kay Bentley in producing such a stimulating and informative publication. For me, one of the greatest attributes of CATS is how it encompasses such a wide range of context, both EFL and ESL, from every corner of the world. It also provides us with a forum in which to share our ideas and learn from each other.

The theme of the spring publication is 'literacy'.

As literacy is such a key part of any language learning, we have tried to include articles that cover a variety of YL contexts. My own background has shown me that we still have so much to learn from practitioners in the different learning environments whether it is in UK state schools, EFL institutes, or international schools (ESL/EAL). I feel this to be particularly true of literacy; as to read and write suggests audience and context, together with a practical knowledge of how a language system works. I see CATS as providing us with one means of sharing this experience.

The articles in this issue include: literacy through computers in Sri Lanka, literacy through computers in Germany, and literacy through drama in Peru. We also have spotlight on Sri Lanka in this issue, giving us an insight into how reading and writing is approached there as well as giving us some historical context.

We will also be introducing two exciting new features:

'**From inside the classroom**' provides an opportunity for young learners to tell us about their perspectives of the language classroom. Their contributions will give us an insight to how they are taught, examples of the activities they do and what they like and don't like about language learning in their particular context. We start this off with students from an international school in France talking about their writing experiences.

'**Web Watcher**' aims to give you some teacher and student-friendly websites that you could use in the language classroom. Under each website there's a short synopsis of the contents, and a suggestion as to suitable age group and or level.

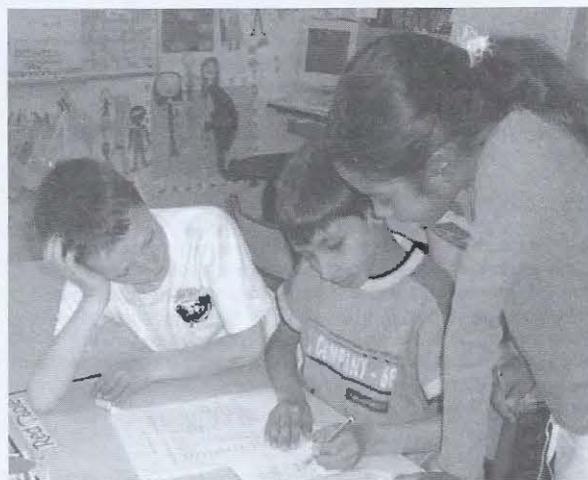
Our regular features this issue take us to The Netherlands, in '**Looking at a Learner**', where we will follow three students, new to an international school, to see how they are integrated into the system. And, to continue our spotlight on Sri Lanka, '**YL SIGs around the world**' will also be finding out what's happening with young learners there.

We are always interested to hear about any suggestions for future issues of CATS, and if you are interested in making a contribution, please let us know.



Kerry Powell

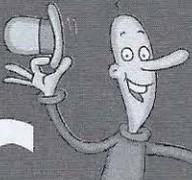
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(Grade 2 students)



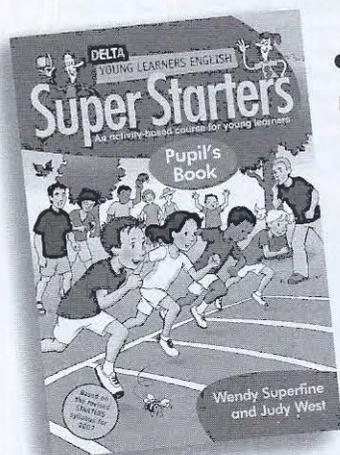
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Exeter is a historic city situated in the heart of the beautiful countryside of Devon. It was built in the Roman times and Roman remains can still be seen. There is much to see and do in Exeter. There is a magnificent cathedral, located in a lovely Cathedral Close with a range of architectural styles, the elegant Rougement Gardens, Exeter Castle, a university, the medieval Exe Bridge, a museum, and a network of underground passages for the more adventurous. Exeter is also famous for its cream teas. The River Exe runs through the centre of the city providing pleasant walks and a paradise for birdwatchers. The Quay is a hub of activity with a range of bars and antique shops. The Devon coast is home to miles of beautiful beaches, seaside fishing towns and famous coastal walks. Close to Exeter is the rugged landscape of Dartmoor with miles of good walking for the more energetic. Devon also boasts a number of National Trust properties with collections of antiques and landscaped gardens. It would be a wonderful venue for a holiday after the conference. The Exeter conference promises to be every bit as exciting as the previous conferences. We have a number of novel attractions to entice you and plan to provide you with a

Devon flavour and a memorable experience. Details are available on our website www.iatefl.org Or by

email to conferenceprocessor@iatefl.org

Computers in the YL Literacy Classroom

Sarah Lawrence

What happens when computers are introduced into a young learner classroom?

This article describes a research project that was carried out in 2002 in Sri Lanka where English is fostered by the Sri Lankan government as a second language. Emphasis is on speaking rather than writing English and consequently many young learners have difficulty writing English whereas their ability to speak is relatively advanced. This difficulty often appears to produce negative attitudes towards writing.

Having learned of the benefits of using computers in the classroom as suggested by researchers such as Pennington (1996) and Daiute (1985) I decided to investigate the effects that introducing computers as a writing tool had on students' attitude and writing in the young learner classroom. I started from these hypotheses:

1. Using the computer as a writing tool would produce a higher standard of writing.
2. The students' interest would be maintained more effectively than with a traditional pen and paper writing task.

The study involved a class of young ESL learners between the ages of eight and eleven at the British Council in Sri Lanka over a period of ten weeks. The students at that time were following a course based around the Walt Disney video 'Robin Hood'. It was clear at the beginning that they already knew the Robin Hood story and many had seen the video. In view of this and in order to maintain their interest students were asked to think of a similar folklore character from their own culture and this is how Saradiyel came about.

The study involved students writing two storybooks: a Robin Hood book, individually, using pen and paper, and the Saradiyel book, in groups, using the computer. Students completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the exercise and at the end to provide data on their computer competencies and their feelings about the exercise. The students kept diaries to record their thoughts and I noted significant classroom observations in a journal.

The handwritten and computer-produced books were compared to identify any differences in the standard of writing and the questionnaires were analysed to provide an overview of the students' computer competencies before and after the exercise. The diaries and informal discussion were used to gain an understanding of the students' attitudes.

A questionnaire and the handwritten book were used to establish the abilities of the students at the beginning of the project. The questionnaire looked at learning opportunities at school and after school and computer competencies that the students claimed to have. 11 out of the 17 students had a computer at home. 9 students had computer lessons at school in English. 6 had computer tuition (of these 3 had no computer lesson at school). All students expressed a desire to learn more about computer use including: email, internet, typing, scanning, printing, drawing, importing pictures and playing games.

In the handwritten books errors were categorized. More than three quarters of the students made spelling mistakes and errors in tense choice. Half omitted articles and missed out capital letters on proper nouns. Less than a quarter had problems with punctuation. Letter formation was a problem for three students. Most books demonstrated creativity and individuality in both design and content.

The computer written Saradiyel books were analysed in the same way. Student comments suggested that they felt one advantage of using the computer was that it indicated errors whereas feedback from the teacher was not usually so immediate. Without exception the story books written on the computer showed coherent narrative, use of linking words, correct use of grammar and spelling above the usual level of the students.

Very much confirming teacher observations, all students said they enjoyed using the computer to make their books. The reasons given fell into three categories – 'easy to make the book on the computer' – 'enjoyed using the computer' – 'interesting to learn new things'

All but one student said they were pleased with their books and preferred using the computer to pen and paper. The reasons were – 'pleased with its appearance and neatness' – 'pleased to have (printed) pictures in it' – 'good story' – 'can read it to parents.' One student was not pleased with his book as he would have preferred to draw pictures – on his own initiative he resorted to drawing illustrations by hand later in his work.

A small increase in computer competencies during the project was registered mainly by those students with the least experience of using the computer.

All students showed interest in learning more about the computer, fourteen wanted to do more projects on the computer.

Students were asked to think about how the computer helped them with their writing. The main responses indicated the ability to correct grammar and spelling, to change writing and to add sentences.

Analysis of the results appears to raise the following issues:

1. Enjoyment/ interest in the computer as a tool

Computers appeared to interest the students and stimulate them into activity. They seemed somehow captivated by the computer so its use in teaching appeared to ensure interest in the subject. Donaldson (1978) suggests that children are 'amazed' by technology and this view appeared to be supported in this piece of research.

2. Presentation of composition

Use of the computer provided a standard of presentation of their work that the students could be pleased with.

3. Correction of errors

The computer drew attention to possible errors – the children could decide whether to change it and could do so autonomously without leaving evidence of correction. The computer appeared to offer the opportunity to rethink and change without penalty which appeared to encourage revision. The 'private' indication of error appeared to preserve students' self-esteem whereas a mistake pointed out by the teacher could be embarrassing and in some cases cause withdrawal from the task. Having been prompted and aided to correct errors on the computer the children may be more likely to learn and to remember the correct spelling or grammar than if the teacher drew attention to the error. Also error identification on the computer was immediate whereas the teacher may not have provided feedback until some time later.

4. Pause and revision

Pennington (1996) referring to the work of Daiute (1983) suggests that the computer prompts intensive reading of the text on the screen leading to reflection and revision. This was evident from teacher observation. Donaldson (1978) drawing on Piaget suggests that when something gives us pause, instead of acting, we consider the possibilities and thus awareness is raised. According to Daiute revision requires the ability to 'distance themselves from the thoughts in their writing so that they can determine whether the ideas are expressed clearly enough for others to understand.' (1985:56) This ability termed 'decentering' by Piaget (Daiute: 1985) appears to be an indication of intellectual development.

It would seem that the computer encouraged the students to read what they had written, reflect on it and revise it and in so doing they achieved a much higher standard of written English.

5. Standard of attainment

The computer appeared to aid students to attain the standard of writing they strived for. Donaldson (1978) quotes Bruner as saying: 'There are tools of the mind as well as tools of the hand – and in either case the development of a powerful new tool brings with it the possibility of leaving old limitations behind.' (1978:84) The computer seems to have offered the opportunity to students held back by poor handwriting and difficulties with spelling to progress beyond this.

The improvements in writing appear to give weight to Pennington's (1996) assertion that the computer assists students to progress into the zone of proximal development. Working in groups on the computer seemed to encourage active social interaction with students keen to help each other and able to share their work more easily than if it was written on paper. This appears to confirm the benefits of collaborative activity when using the computer suggested by Slaout (2000) and Piper (1987)

6. Computer as materials

Tomlinson (1998) puts forward the view that materials should make an impact on the learner. It would appear that using the computer had great attraction for the learners as it offered a wide variety of materials within one machine and allowed them the opportunity to interact with it. The students made good and imaginative use of the clipart library and of the computer tools available to change font size, style and colour.

7. Computer as a learning tool

The computer appears to be a flexible, versatile tool with the ability to support the different learning styles proposed by Gardner (1994) in his Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Kinaesthetic learners seem to delight in touching the keys and seeing the letters appear on the screen. Visual learners also appear to derive pleasure from seeing their work appear instantaneously on the screen. It may also support those who learn linguistically as it offers support in the form of a dictionary and thesaurus and logico-mathematical learners appear pleased with the logical nature of the computer processes.

The results indicate that using the computer is interesting for the students leading to more positive attitudes towards writing. The computer appears to help students achieve a higher level of writing. It is even possible that computer support goes a stage further by prompting students to read and revise what they have written, causing pause, developing reflective awareness and contributing to their intellectual development.

It is probable that different results would be found if the effects of computer-assisted writing were being investigated in another culture. At the time this research was carried out computers were not readily available in Sri Lanka and therefore learner were particularly keen to use them.

Although outside the scope of this action research project, this summary would not be complete without acknowledging the seemingly indispensable role, in the modern world, of electronic communication of the written word via computers, which in time could possibly render obsolete the use of handwriting as a means of communication.

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'Tell me a story, write me a story'

Developing literacy skills through drama

Pamela Curtin

"Drama can be seen as a powerful tool for developing literacy skills as defined in the National Curriculum: it gives teachers and children the opportunity to explore and develop their listening and speaking skills further exposing them to, and giving them the opportunity to try for themselves, different models, patterns and modes of speech and expression. It can help children understand how language is constructed and used. It can expand children's vocabulary and encourage them to become playful wordsmiths." (Turner & Mayall et al., 2004, p.42)

Introduction

This article documents a critical literacy process used by First Grade children and their teachers at a British-Peruvian school in Lima. It draws on the belief that literacy is more than learning to read and write in traditional ways and instead involves physical engagement and active investigation of text through performance and social critique.

It is argued that by encouraging students to become the creators of text in different ways they might become more confident when tackling basic literacy tasks. As Sebesta claims, "You can decode and comprehend and still not care. You can become adept at answering thought questions without really responding from the heart or the creative mind....[reading and writing] ought to lead to humanities in literacy education, including creative drama and dramatic play, story telling and interpretive oral reading, music and dance, the visual arts. (Sebesta, 1997, pp.545-548).

Over several months the First Grade students in this school, primarily non-native and struggling with basic conversation in English, work through a process of creating and producing stories for theatrical performance that demonstrates many layers of learning. Through using various skills, or multiple intelligences, this process has provoked in many students a desire to speak, read and write more in English.

Planning the process

Inspired by the forward-thinking, constructivist approach of the International Baccalaureate – Primary Years Program (PYP) that is

used in the school, the class teachers, specialist teachers and Heads of Level decided, at the end of 2004, that the traditional approach to the First Grade concert was too limiting. It was a time-consuming event made up of students learning and rehearsing an already-scripted play, often in chorus and using vocabulary of which they weren't always accustomed. Moreover, through fault and lack of insight of our own, it had very little relevance to the curriculum, involved no critical analysis and did little to showcase the true talents of each student.

It was decided that the 'First Grade Play', as it is now called, would be a student production from beginning to end. The idea was to provide opportunities for all students in each class to collaborate and develop a set of three stories linked to an overarching theme. The stories would then become plays and the plays would have language that was known by them and/or had meaning for them. Most importantly it would be a student-driven process rather than simply a colourful parent-pleasing event, and would reflect students' views and allow them to feel ownership over their entire performance.

This hands-on blend of drama and literacy is a particularly valuable experience for young second language learners as is reflected in *Educating Second Language Children*: "By making a close connection between children's oral language and what they read and write, it becomes easier for children who have not had extensive exposure to print to see that print can be a representation of speech...Using student-generated materials also confirms and reaffirms to children their own worth and the value of their cultural and personal experiences." (Hamayan, 1994, p.293).

The process was easily linked with the curriculum through 'Tell me a story, write me a story'. This is a six-week unit at the end of the year and is ideal for the summative activities of final rehearsals, set design, choreography, singing, the actual performance and subsequent reflections. However, the initial story development needed to begin much earlier in the year. As a result the story creation process is part of a follow-up reflective activity to the first unit of work 'Living in Harmony' in Term 1.

Story creation and development

Challenging six and seven year olds to think about Living in Harmony with each other is relatively uncomplicated. Moving from their personal social experiences to larger issues regarding living in harmony with the world is slightly more complex mainly due to their limited levels of English. It also involves being willing to create plays that are open-minded to finding magical solutions to major global concerns such as pollution. While the stories might be full of sea fairies, pirates, dragons or talking cows, the insights of the children also involve negotiation and social justice.

It became clear in the first year of this project that a setting was needed to harness ideas and develop feasible plotlines. Following this, students are exposed to films and books about the specific setting. Discussions about social and environmental problems aim to lead to critical thinking about stories read aloud. It is common that at this early stage of the year (nearing the end of Term 1) students are still explaining some of their ideas in Spanish although the teacher should be responding to them in English. Once social issues are listed by students and one is voted on, the children make a list of potential characters (everyone has a role and speaking part – the idea has been to try moving away from 'main characters'). The stories begin and students become familiar with specific, relevant vocabulary both orally and in written format.

In group-work students discuss possible scenarios about what might happen in relation to the social concern within the setting. They draw sequenced pictures using characters from the list and write down their ideas. Led by the teacher for the sake of continuity, story creation also occurs through discussion in small groups, each focused on beginning, middle or end of the play. Groups can also move from table to table writing their ideas on large posters according to the beginning, middle and end structure. Writing in English is always supported by the use of a personal dictionary for them to first try writing an unknown word. A resource table of colourful, Disney dictionaries is available and students are encouraged to look for words they think are relevant to the topic.

When the storyline is developed in groups it is then brought back to the class for discussion. Before it develops further as text it is workshopped with the drama teacher. When students are familiar with the story outline and plot, teaching teams (Teacher, Teacher Assistant, Drama Teacher) work with groups of students on different scenes. Children brainstorm, sometimes through drama and sometimes in discussion, potential dialogue together and in so doing move the story forward, creating not only speech for the characters but also new storyline possibilities. By this stage of the process, now mid-year, students are becoming more confident and capable when speaking in English, although some dialogue suggestions still need to be translated by the teacher. An exciting part of the process has been to get inside the heads of the students. A lot of their dialogue is funny, engaging and whimsical – ideas and voices that could only come from children of this age.

By the time students receive the scripts and roles they have already been rehearsing the play and are mentally well versed in the class storyline. They have an awareness of each character's contribution to the development of the story and read their lines with expression in such a natural way, in tune with their character's motivations. Character analysis follows as the rehearsals increase. Children begin to discuss who they are and what they do in the play, sometimes referring to their character in the first person and sometimes in the third. They write about what they like and don't like in the story according to the viewpoint of their character. They talk about their characters in front of the camera in English and reflect on the storyline and the process for the "making of ..." video that is screened during intermission on the night of the Play.

Plays are mapped on spiderwebs, whereby children work in groups to find the main events/ideas in each scene and write them on a small poster. Later, after the play is over, they use these spidergrams to write up their class book on the play. These books are then professionally bound and placed in the school library. This reinforces the work of the unit: 'Tell me a story, write me a story' as children have visits from an author and learn about the different processes in making a book: primarily the roles of author, illustrator, publisher and printer.

Reflections

The children sing and dance and recite their lines wearing colourful costumes just like in previous times. Yet it is markedly different. Children are confident and have taken ownership. They are knowledge producers, critical thinkers and readers and writers of English. Their input shapes every aspect of the process, including assisting in the choreography with the dance teacher. We cannot prove that it changes their literacy levels but we can say that they develop what they read and write and they do it with great enthusiasm. Penny Bundy talks about drama as Animation leading to Connection leading to Heightened Awareness. And of course in the words of Paulo Freire (1973) "To acquire literacy is more than to psychologically and mechanically dominate reading and writing techniques. It is to dominate those techniques in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands..."

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Picture books

– as a gateway to literacy and the habit of reading for young learners.

Janice Bland

Picture books can be complex texts. The interplay of word and image can elicit surprising exchanges, revealing something freshly meaningful on each new reading. Evocative pictures can cast a spell of wonder, drawing children into the world of the book and holding them there long enough for imaginative and creative interaction with the text.

All sorts of literacies are involved in learning with picture books. Functional literacy, learning to read and write, can be supported by the mnemonic patterning (e.g. rhythm, rhyme, repetition, onomatopoeia and alliteration) of many literary picture books. Visual literacy is a paramount skill in a multi-media world, where the image has become a major tool of communication. Cultural literacy may be exercised through the sharing of picture books. Pictures can perform as windows on unfamiliar cultural contexts, and as an opening for the imaginative understanding of otherness. "Literary" literacy, taking pleasure in reading between the lines and constructing meanings, is an all-important complement to functional literacy.

Picture books are usually regarded as a scaffolding context for language learning. The verbal text is seen as central, the pictures as stimulating and supportive. A verbal text that is pattern-driven (e.g. with repetition and rhyme) and therefore predictable will effectively aid children's language acquisition (Linse 2006, 75-77).

The approach I wish to sketch here is based on concepts of reader-response theory: the contribution of picture books to children's personal growth, to the achieving of critical literacy. "The pedagogic role of the picture book has been extended to include its use to create readers and to help literary and aesthetic development" (Doonan 1996, 232). The sooner children learn to bond with books the better, and children are highly motivated by stories and colourful pictures. It is a cross-curricular approach, some of the learning may take place in the mother tongue; the research behind it is centred on L1 and L2 education as well as foreign language learning.

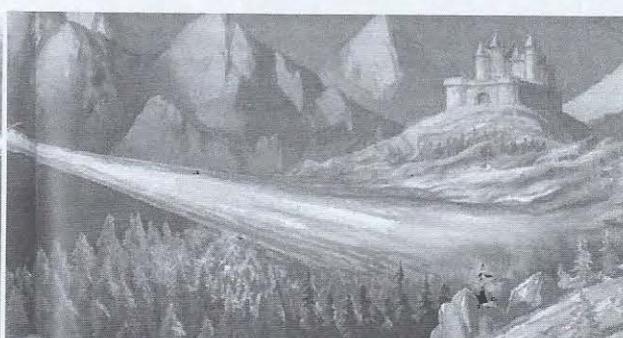
Visual literacy

George and the Dragon (Wormell 2002) has magnificent pictures, with the appeal of mountains and caves, an enormous, luminous blood-red dragon (almost always spread across two pages), a castle and a princess. The pictures call to mind other myths and stories the children have enjoyed. This intertextuality is a favourite enriching device in children's literature. Here the simple story, just one sentence per page, tells of the defeat of the dragon by George, a mouse. In children's literature, the smallest creatures often possess heroic qualities, providing the child reader with a role-model within reach. The heroes and heroines are vulnerable, yet show creativity and bravery. They undertake difficult quests, and yet manage to overcome most obstacles.

An interesting exercise in visual literacy is to show that pictures, like stories, can be open to different interpretations. The caption belonging to the picture illustrated above is "He could burn down a forest with a blast of his mighty breath". Together with the children, the teacher can invent an entirely different story with perhaps a happy end for the dragon, e.g. an invented caption to this picture: *Ulla alone plays with fire when she feels sad and lonely*. Writing new captions, creating a different story to the pictures, reveals that the pictures are not "real". In this way we are preparing children for a study of questions of validity and ideology with regard to the visual media that surround them (television, films, advertising, drawings,



He could burn down a forest



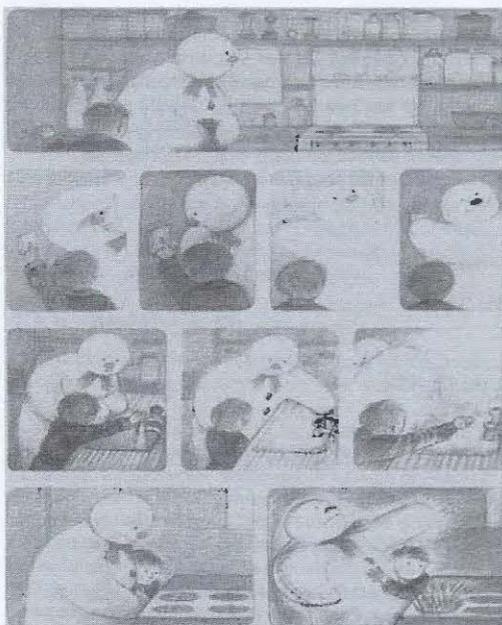
with a blast of his fiery breath.

George and the Dragon (Copyright©Wormell 2002)

A diagrams, symbols, photographs, videos, sculpture and paintings). And "the more both adults and children realize the degree to which all representations misrepresent the world, the less likely they will be to confuse any particular representation with reality, or to be unconsciously influenced by ideologies they have not considered" (Nodelman 1996: 123).

"Literary" literacy

Strange as it may seem, the case for regarding picture books as literature rests largely on the narrative pictures and their dynamic interaction with (minimal) verbal text. Many ingenious picture books surprise and perplex readers, while stimulating them to ask questions and articulate ideas. While wondering, comparing, discovering, inferring, comprehending, children can learn confidence



The Snowman (Copyright © Briggs, 1978)
Page 8 from *THE SNOWMAN* by Raymond Briggs (Hamish Hamilton, 1978) Copyright © Raymond Briggs, 1978. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

in their own reading response by "reading" pictures. "These are central concerns of literary reading, the need to infer, which is a key skill for all learners to develop more widely" (Hall 2005, 21).

A picture book with sophisticated content may have no words at all, such as the classic picture book *The Snowman* (Briggs 1978). This picture narrative of a magical friendship is portrayed with exquisite detail and wonder of discovery. When children interpret why the snowman is a novice with electricity and hot water they are learning to fill in the gaps, to "read between the lines". When they empathise with the snowman's helplessness and awe they are learning to look and see from another's perspective. Here the literal point of view of the boy narrator (we mostly see the back of his head and the snowman literally through the boy's eyes) cleverly focalizes the reader's attention on the fear and confusion felt by the snowman on discovering an unknown world. Picture books with little or no verbal text offer many opportunities for creative language work in the primary school, e.g. inventing speech balloons for pictures such as *Help! Danger! Watch out! Don't touch! Keep away! Stop! Don't move! Come away! Be careful! Whoops!...* Re-creating is creating: writing a new dialogue is a way of enacting the construction of meaning.

Cultural literacy

Literature is a highly expressive carrier of cultural meaning. An example of this suitable for young learners is *Handa's Surprise* (Browne 1994), which is set in Kenya. Handa puts some delicious fruit into a basket for her friend, Akeyo. We see her on her way to Akeyo's village, while the verbal text records her thoughts. An astute picture book reader will already spot the monkey's tail in the branches above Handa, who walks with her basket of fruit balanced superbly on her head, thinking: *I wonder which fruit she'll like best?* The next question: *Will she like the soft yellow banana, or the sweet-smelling guava?* is accompanied by two richly detailed doublespreads of first a mischievous monkey stealing the banana and then an ostrich snatching the guava. Handa walks on oblivious of the tricks the animals are playing, and so the book continues. The pictures are breathtakingly vibrant and colourful, the fruit looks delicious, juicy, exotic and sweet-smelling, so that the reader is drawn into a luscious world of sensations.

Postmodern authors often create a puzzle with a verbal text that is contradicted by the picture narrative. Picture books such as this are "multi-layered"; the reader is invited to read and re-read them, all the time finding more ways to interpret and fill in the details. This puts the young readers in charge of the story. The reader shares a reading secret with the author; children gain confidence and pleasure in their response to literary texts. The impact on the reader of *Handa's Surprise* certainly includes being "in the know" with the author, perceiving and knowing more than Handa, who is surprised at the end by the humorous results of the animals' antics.

European children reading this picture book tend, at first glance, to see their expectations fulfilled that Handa is poor. Through more careful readings children come to see that Handa is also rich. They find that she is rich in friends, in space to play, in the beauty of the wildlife and spectacular landscapes that surround her, in fresh produce, in bright colours and in time to play in the great outdoors.



Handa's Surprise (Copyright © Browne, 1994)
(Reproduced by kind permission of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 5HJ)

"Literary works first evoke and then frustrate the reader's expectations, thus (if the reader continues reading) gradually changing his frame of reference" (Tabbert 1980: 36). *Handa's Surprise* contains no more than thirteen sentences; any change in the reader's frame of reference will be due to the pictures. Eileen Browne states in her acknowledgement: "The children featured in this book are from the Luo tribe of south-west Kenya". Attention to accuracy, detail and aesthetic value is the hallmark of quality picture books.

Characterisation is often additionally developed through "the unique possibility to elaborate with close-ups, so that we literally can come closer to characters and almost feel as if we were talking to them" (Nikolajeva 2003: 44). The careful narrative technique of quality picture

books is cinematic: holding up a picture book to a large class that can hardly see the pictures is not the way to use its potential. Fortunately publishers are beginning to provide DVDs (best projected in class onto a large screen) with their bestselling books.

Functional literacy

Children's literary texts with strong sound patterning are particularly supportive for functional literacy. Some cumulative picture books and fairy tales are rich in rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and refrains. Rhythmical repetition is hypnotic, for adults as well as children. For centuries chants have been used to enchant audiences and gatherings. Rhymes as mother-infant "dialogues" play a significant role in first language acquisition. Longitudinal research has established that pre-school, informal experience of linguistic routines, such as singing and reciting nursery rhymes, play a role in preparing children for reading and writing (Bryant et al. 1989 and 1990). Rhymes and alliteration draw children's attention to the recurrence of patterns and sound-spelling correspondences.

In foreign language teaching, rhymes and stories are also first collected aurally. Pictures facilitate the first-time reading of familiar texts by recalling to the reader's mind the echoes of words often heard before. In this way the pictures aid recognition of how the sound-images match the verbal text on the page. This leads to an all important upward swing of success, first steps in learner autonomy and pleasure in reading.



Three Billy Goats Gruff
(Copyright © Bland & Lottemoser, 2007)

Reading is facilitated by immediately recognizable recurrent plot patterns, such as the repetition in groups of three in many traditional tales. In this version of *Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Bland & Lottemoser 2007) the dialogue turn taking is emphasised through the use of speech balloons. Comic reading is reading in a social context; children love to swap their comics, read in role and act out scenes. Interaction with picture books – above-all with the pictures – becomes a key to unlock new understanding. Authors leave gaps to fill with the confidence that the young reader will be an imaginative, tolerant and creative addressee, giving time generously and with as yet few cultural prejudices. These gaps are ideal for the mutual forming of in a community of readers. For these reasons, young learners take naturally to children's literature and will – given the opportunity – form the habit of reading.

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From inside the classroom

Grade 5 students, International School of Paris

Hi! We are 5th Grade students at the International school in Paris. In the Primary School there are around 200 students representing 39 different nationalities. Over 32 different languages are spoken in the school community, but the language of instruction is English. All primary school students also have daily French lessons. The students in the classes are mainly using English as a second or additional language, and range from complete beginners to native speakers with all the levels in between.

The school follows the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, in which we study through 'Units of Inquiry'. Literacy is done through these 'inquiries' and through timetabled 'writing workshops', which we will explain below.

The Writing Process

With writing, we are encouraged to focus on the process of writing as much as the final publication. How this works is as follows:

First, we look at pieces of writing in the style that we are going to work on as a class. We identify what the content includes and give them headings, for example, 'technical language' or 'passive verbs'. From this, we make a list of criteria to include in our own writing. The next stage is the 'brainstorm'. This is sometimes done as a whole class with a flip chart, sometimes as a small group or with a partner, and sometimes individually. In the brainstorms we just write down anything that comes into our heads – words, phrases, pictures. Some of the class organise their brainstorms under categories, but others of us organise the ideas later. Once we've got enough ideas (and we often feedback these ideas with the rest of the class) we start to work on our first drafts.

The first draft is an important part of the writing process: it gives us the chance to just write and get our ideas down without having to stop and think about spelling, grammar, punctuation. The teacher usually comes round and works with us on this, especially if we're stuck for ideas. After completing the first draft, we do a 'buddy check'. (We can also do this at any point in the process.) A 'buddy check' is when a classmate/teacher/support teacher/parent reads through our work, and gives some constructive criticism. This means that they comment on the writing, and make suggestions that we can use in our second draft.

The second draft is when we read our work again and add any of the suggestions that have been made. It is also the time when we look at the list of criteria that we made and pay more attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation. The teacher helps with highlighting or explaining grammar or punctuation points as necessary.

Literacy in the Units of Inquiry

In the primary school we do six units of inquiry a year. These have different subject focuses. For example, the unit that we have just been doing is called 'Arts in Action'. This has a strong Arts and Social Science focus. So, in literacy, one thing we are encouraged to look at is how we can write about art: describing it, writing a critique about it, etc. We also have to go to actual exhibitions to see how they are set up, as part of the inquiry is to plan our own exhibition. We then have to do the artwork and do a follow up catalogue about the pieces of art and write reviews. It's really exciting and incredible to think how much literacy you can get out of a real 'real-life' event. We get to plan all the jobs for the exhibition, design flyers and advertisements to promote the event and to decide how the whole thing's going to be arranged. Of course, this is where we also find out that organising an exhibition isn't actually that straight forward, and where we have to ask the teachers for some help!

Writing Workshop

Basically, writing workshops sessions, usually an hour long, are times set aside for writing. In these sessions we read, analyse and write different types of text for different audiences and have the chance to develop our own writing. As our curriculum is done through units of inquiry, the reading/writing focus depends on the unit focus. In this unit, the writing workshop sessions were used to work on describing art, and how to write a critique, which we would then use for the catalogue and exhibition reviews. The teacher sits with individual students while they discuss what they have written and think about how they might go about improving it. The teacher might also use this time to work with a specific language or grammatical point with the student, or talk about it with the whole class.

Other reading and writing we have focused on so far this year in writing workshop and in the units, include creative writing, writing to explain how something works (the nervous system, for example), writing a recount, memoir and characterisation.

We've tried to select a few examples of writing that we've done for this unit, and a couple of photos showing us at work...collaborating with our classmates! We hope you enjoy them.



(Two students collaborating on a piece of writing)

Writing from our 5th Grade art exhibition catalogue:

'...I started to make this from the end of January to the beginning of February. I constructed it at school but the idea came from a conversation I was having with my parents when they asked me what most concerned me about pollution....I encountered problems when I tried my first effort on my final copy with balloons, but they all popped. I could also have achieved this by taking some tissue paper and a huge ball, covering it with glue, dry it, and paint it.'

(English/Arabic speaker)

'...My description. In my picture in the background are kinds of emeralds and it is light green. In the foreground there are flowers, trees, sun and clouds. The pond is light blue and sun is yellow, orange and red. In opposite side there are the trees which is green and blown. In the foreground near the flower is red, pink and orange materials.'

(Japanese speaker)

'...On the top of the Eiffel Tower is the French flag. The sun in the top left corner is shining brightly on a warm summer day...When you look on the middle line there are windmills on the left side and on the right side there are mountains from Italy where I go skiing every year. On the bottom right side there is a street with cars polluting the air in Paris. In the top right corner there is a greenish, blue and white coloured cloud which looks like a rainy or snowy cloud. I have created my painting with a frame round it...I could have achieved my painting in an other way by taking more time for details and making the perspective of the street better.'

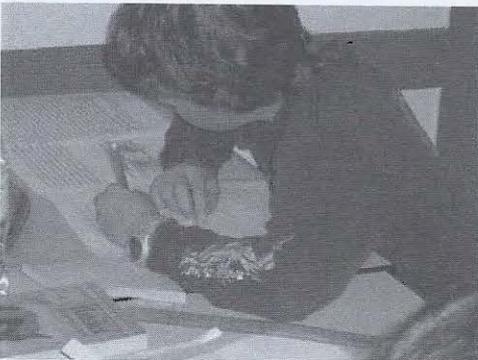
(Dutch/Flemish speaker)

'...This piece of art is a drawing of a cigarette-smoking man. It shows that smoking is unhealthy and unpleasant. Smoking is dangerous. At the top of the drawing there is orange, yellow and little bit of black sky. In the foreground you can see a very big cigarette...'

(Hebrew speaker)

'...My art work is about the society I come from which is India. In India sun rising from the sea is normal thing which happens in India. But in this painting I want to show how India is rising economically. The foreground of my painting is the sea and I painted it blue and shaky. I also drew a reflection of the sun in the sea...If I had more time I could have done the sea and sun in 3 dimensional.'

(English/Hindi speaker)



Accessing Literacy in Sri Lankan primary classes

Rajiva Wijesinha

During the colonial period English was a medium of instruction at all levels of the curriculum in Sri Lanka. The indigenous languages, Sinhala and Tamil, also continued to be used for this purpose, but English was the language of privilege and those who studied all their subjects in English, beginning from primary level, were at an advantage.

When education came under the control of Sri Lankans, with limited self-government in the thirties, initially the aim was to make English medium education more widely available. However, as became common in Sri Lanka, levelling downward was thought by politicians to be easier and more popular. It was proposed in 1943 that Sinhala be compulsorily the medium of education for all students. Tamil was added and, though options (removed in the fifties) were allowed at secondary level, from the mid-forties English medium education became illegal at primary level.

Though English was supposed to be taught as a second language, this was not successful and only succeeded amongst students who learned English at home anyway. The social gaps engendered through education widened, but at first this did not seem important, in a context in which many planners thought English would soon be gone completely. When contact with the outside world was required, it was thought that it could be conducted in Russian or Japanese.

By the seventies, when it became clear that English would not just go away, it was also recognized that it was now in fact a Foreign Language to the vast majority of Sri Lankans. Teaching it from the very first years of schooling was deemed inappropriate, so English was to start only from the third year of primary school.

hand, leg, mouth, eye, nose, ear, face, head, hair
 sun, moon, tree, sky, rain
 dog, cow, cat, hen, elephant,
 ball, bat, balloon, kite, doll

VERBS

be - is, am, are, was, were
 have, can, sit, sing, stand, cry, laugh, eat, drink,
 jump, clap, run, walk, come, go, give, read, look,
 show, play, give, bring, cut, colour, paste, sleep,
 add

PRONOUNS

you, it, my, your, his, her
 he, she, I.

ADJECTIVES

red, blue, green, black, white,
 big, small, tall, short, good, bad, cold, hot
 cardinal numbers up to ten

COURTESIES

please, thank you, good morning, good afternoon, hello
 and

CONNECTIVES

and

Structures

Simple sentences with: This/That is .. eg This/That is + a
 noun, He/She is + adjective
 Possessives / Demonstratives: my / your / his / her / These/
 Those (are)

GRADE 2

Students should (in addition to the Grade 1 competencies)

- follow simple instructions involving an object, eg show me the door, bring the scissors, cut the picture out, paste the picture in your book, colour the picture, draw a cat, throw the ball, give me the book, show me three fingers etc
- listen to a story and sequence pictures accordingly
- repeat simple rhymes and sing simple songs (students should also see the written version of the rhymes and songs)
- respond to simple question forms using 'is'
- understand and use language for supplying basic personal information
- become familiar with the letters of the alphabet, both simples and capitals
- perform basic mathematical functions (add, minus) in English
- recognize and match one-syllable sounds with the written form, eg: cat, bat
- produce simple words corresponding to the sound of some letters of the alphabet (the short, simple vowel sounds as in cat, bed, tin, pot, run)
- trace lower case letter shapes and draw other basic shapes (large and small) to assist them with letter formation (with exercises to encourage appropriate hand movement), viz

U U U UUU U U U UUU n n n
 nnn n n n nnnn
 V V V VVV V V V VVV A A A
 AAA A A A AAA
 A A A AAAA A A A AAA ωωω VVV
 ωωω VVV

Vocabulary level should encompass about 250 words, inclusive of the following in addition to those learned earlier.

NOUNS

fruit, water, tea, milk, orange, apple, mango, egg, chocolate,
 biscuits, toffee
 man, woman, doctor, arm, foot, toe, finger, aunt, uncle,
 teacher
 pen, eraser, cupboard, chalk, duster, picture, bell, cup, glass, desk,
 gum, clay, group, tap, calendar, bottle, box, ruler, monitor, staff
 room, office, canteen, gate
 swing, toy, balloon, house, market, shop, light, bed, radio,
 doll
 train, plane, van, ship, boat, motor cycle, lorry, tractor, cart
 star, flower, animal, fish, bird, crow, goat, ant, butterfly, rat,
 river, tank, sea, wind, cloud, fly

PRONOUNS

we, they, me, him, her, us, them

VERBS

dance write, tell, fall, talk, say, haven't, can't, put, wash, take,
 bathe, sleep

ADJECTIVES

brown, yellow, pink, purple, orange, happy, sad, fat, thin,
 hungry, little, dirty, kind, angry
 numbers up to twenty

ADVERBS

fast, slow, up, down

COURTESIES

I'm sorry, good evening, good night

CONNECTIVES

then, minus

Structures

Questions and answers to questions with Is it...? (positive and
 negative answers) What is...? Where is ..?
 (Articles should be used correctly by the teacher as possible,
 though these need not be expected from students)
 Sentences with I am / You are : This is / That is

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Looking At A Learner

Deb Perrin

The school is a large British International School that follows the English National Curriculum. Children arrive throughout the school year and at any time during their primary school years [4 – 11 years old] The school is non selective and does not test children prior to entry for ability or level of English.

The first question parents ask when they visit the school prior to admission is, how does it work for children who speak no or little English? The children start with such different backgrounds and educational experiences that to assume they can fit into a homogenous group called 'beginners', 'intermediate' or 'advanced' is helpful for about the first week.

So how do we 'do it'?

When a child starts at the school they and their family are committing themselves to more than just the child learning English. They are committing themselves to an English speaking education. The children are 'learning to learn' in English. [Gibbons, P.1991] This is central to understanding the principles behind support for children learning English. It is also the first point that has to be made clear to parents. To emphasize that the child will need to learn English for all subjects and for all school life. Some parents are well aware of this and for others it is a new idea. We also emphasize the time scale involved, that it can take up to two years to acquire English for social communication purposes [BICS] and up to seven years to acquire English for academic purpose at native English speaker peer level [CALP].

Children join the mainstream class straightaway. They are given a 'buddy' to help them. Where possible a 'buddy' who speaks the child's first language is chosen from the class. If this is not possible a child representing the language or country of the new child is asked to help.

The children are encouraged to continue using their home languages to communicate in school. Parents are also asked to continue to support their children in the home languages to continue cognitive development and given ideas of how to help their children at home.

Our first concern for any new child is their social and emotional happiness. Children who make friends quickly and feel secure and confident in their new school make good progress in learning. It is essential that all the teachers who work with the children understand what it is like to be a new pupil. Intonation, gesture and facial expression can all be misinterpreted by the child, depending on cultural background. The layout of the classroom and the organization within the classroom is often completely new to the children and can mislead children as to what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour.

The school has an EAL Department [English as an Additional Language] to support children who are learning to learn in English. The EAL team teaches children who are new to English but also children who are socially fluent in English but who are not reading or writing in English to a level that they can work independently across the curriculum.

The EAL support works within and along side the framework of the English National Curriculum. This presents constraints and challenges for all teachers. The school has a well defined curriculum for which there are half term plans and overviews. As with any national curriculum the premise behind the design is a school population that starts in the first year [in the UK aged 4] and progresses year by year through the program building on the previous year's input. Herein lays the school's first challenge; children arriving at any point during their school career. Therefore they have not necessarily had the building blocks of the Foundation Stage curriculum in English. By the time children are nine years old the curriculum assumes children have

acquired and can apply a vast range of subject specific vocabulary, concepts and skills.

The teaching of English to pupils new to our school has to take on this challenge and go beyond the traditional TEFL course for young learners. To illustrate this I have chosen, as an example, to write about one group of pupils who are being supported by the EAL Team.

Three children started at the school in September all aged nine years old. Pupil 1 is a German speaker who had just started, having had some English-as-a-Foreign-Language lessons in her native country. Pupil 2 has lived in the Netherlands but went to a German school and is a speaker of German. He is socially fluent in English. Pupil 3 is a Russian speaker who had begun English as a Foreign Language lessons at his previous school. The children all need to be able to read and write in English independently, as soon as they can, to be able to access the curriculum for their age. One target for these pupils is to develop creative writing skills and descriptive language. The English National Curriculum requires that children of their age are able to write texts using a range of descriptive language including similes and metaphors.

The three pupils new to the school were grouped with another three children who all needed to develop the same skills or who needed to revise and revisit the target skills. It was an advantage to work with a mixed group, where several of the children are socially fluent in English. Peer learning was possible through pair work and collaborative learning activities and also enabled the more fluent pupils to be challenged.

Five weeks were spent working on short stories with a repetitive story and language structure. The stories used were: "The Enormous Watermelon", "Not No Bernard", and "The Six Blind Men and the Elephant." The stories were chosen for their clear illustrations that supported the text and meaning, and a limited range of vocabulary. To motivate and keep such a mixed ability group interested I also chose the stories for another essential ingredient; humour. The lesson structure was to include the concept of note taking; a skill that is developed during the last years of British Primary education and one that is cross-curricular. The structure was:

- Introduce the story and book
- Give key vocabulary and teach visuals / contextualised examples
- Read the story and pupils listen
- Read the story again but stop at the end of each page and model how to take notes on white board
- Pupils taught how to copy simple notes into book, layout
- Working as a group retell the story orally using the notes and peer support
- Write the story using the notes taken with teacher support as necessary

The structure remained the same for the third story except they did not write the story until the following week. The children worked on descriptive language and the idea of simile instead and again prior to writing the story.

"The Six blind Men and the Elephant" was used to introduce the concept of descriptive vocabulary in English and to introduce the use of similes. The story is about six blind men who, having never seen an elephant, want to find out what an elephant is. The six men each touch the elephant one by one, feeling a different part of the animal. Each man uses a simile to describe what he has felt; e.g. "it's sharp like a knife" to describe the tusk.

We used a grid to record which man said what, with pictures of the objects instead of the words. The group then filled in the descriptive words to match the name of the man and the object. This was completed as a group. The children then listened to the story again and took notes. This was modelled by the teacher but by this stage the

children were writing down their own choice of notes as well the teacher's suggestions.

The following session the children wrote the story of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant, using their notes and the descriptive vocabulary grid and though they were able to ask for my support, most wrote with a minimum of help. As they finished I read each of their stories to them and they all went away to edit something without being asked.

The new children were coping well with the format of the lessons and using new vocabulary within a familiar structure. The next step was to move the children from a retelling to 'creating'. To achieve this I wanted the group to concentrate on being 'wordsmiths' rather than 'plot designers'. By keeping to a familiar story structure it helps children from ending up with a story that does not make sense when read back and then losing all interest and enthusiasm for their text. By knowing the plot in advance they can keep track of where the story is going. It also gives the pupil possibilities of developing editing skills, another skill that children are expected to develop according to the English National Curriculum.

It was with these different points in mind that I decided on the 'The Six Blind Men and The Giraffe'. At this point several of the group could have lost motivation and interest in writing another story in the same way. A different medium was needed to create a new challenge. The story was to be written in PowerPoint and for a younger audience of six year olds.

Prior to writing the children:

- Were taught through key visuals the body parts of a giraffe, e.g. tail
- Used a grid to learn nine adjectives and match them up to the parts of the giraffe
- Through group work orally worked on describing the different parts of the giraffe
- Had opportunities to discuss the meanings of words
- Draw on prior knowledge and known vocabulary

The children wrote a first draft in their books and then wrote this in PowerPoint editing as they worked. During each writing session the group were stopped after about twenty minutes and asked to pair up. The peer support worked well and during this part of the session gave me the opportunity to observe each pupil and assess their learning.

It has to be remembered that along side of the weekly session to develop creative writing, the children are being taught the four skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking by both the class teacher and the EAL teacher throughout the whole school week. The partnership between the class teacher and EAL teacher has to be based on: good communication, a clear framework and language development placed at the heart of teaching and learning for pupils learning to learn in English. Although a challenge it is possible to teach English language skills along side age appropriate curriculum related concepts and skills.

Deborah Perrin, M.Ed is currently the EAL Coordinator for the Primary section of [3-11 year olds] at the British School in the Netherlands; Hague Schools. Deborah has taught and worked with pupils learning English as an Additional Language for 20 years.

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The Six Blind Men and the Elephant

Name of man						
Haresh						
Nimish						
Vinod						
Sunil						
Hiran						
Pran						

The Six Blind Men and The Giraffe

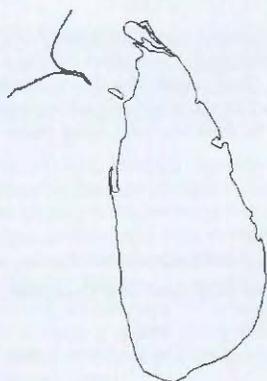
	soft	long	hard	small	smooth	round	flat	big	tall	Soft
neck										
body										
tail										
legs										
horns										
ears										

long	hard	cold	rubbery
sharp	high	round	wide
thin	flat	smooth	

YL SIGs AROUND THE WORLD

SRI LANKA

Molina de S Jayaratna



The first Special Interest Group of the Sri Lanka English Teachers Association (Sletta) was established in August 2006 at its 4th International Conference. Sixty five members expressed their willingness to join the Young Learners SIG on that day. Having a special interest group for young learners is an urgent need today, as the majority of the students in Sri Lanka belong to the age group of 6-13. The specific methodology in teaching English, the new and innovative techniques and sharing the experiences of understanding the young children within the teaching community locally and internationally is of utmost importance. The Sletta YL SIG intends to do that by building a strong membership within the next 5 years and by liaising with the other international associations such as IATEFL YL SIG, ASIA TEFLand TESOL.



(Members of SLETTA)

The committee consists of 6 members from different teaching fields. The Coordinator is Molina who was the former secretary of the Sletta and a Deputy Director of Education. The Secretary, Jenny, is an experienced teacher in a leading private school in Colombo. The Treasurer, Ramani, is a Director for the largest private English medium school network in the country. Out of the other members, Janet Orr is the Education Consultant at the USAID and a former chair of the TESOL. She has strong connections with the IATEFL YL SIG and her experience and expertise is a strength to us. Experienced Singanayagam is the officer in charge for English of the Uva Province, Neelika is the Principal of a school for very young learners and Chitranganie is also a very experienced teacher of English in a Private school. All these members are enthusiastic and hard working.

We plan to run teacher-training workshops for the teachers in the relevant field within the next couple of months. We do hope to have an international conference in June – July period as we have envisaged teacher training as priority. This will give the members a chance to listen to a number of experienced presenters from Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

We also would love to have close links with the IATEFL SIG and would be grateful if members write to us. We plan to circulate a publication twice a year and if you would like to contribute to this publication. I would like to thank the Editor of CATS for inviting me to write this to your publication and I do hope that we would be able to have a very cordial relationship between us.



(Children at work in a Sri Lankan classroom)

Molina de S Jayaratna is Coordinator of the Sletta YL SIG and a Deputy Director of Education

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Book Review

'Teenagers' Gordon Lewis

Resource Books for Teachers (ed. Alan Maley)
Oxford University Press, 2007

Gordon Lewis is a familiar and respected author of two books in the OUP Resource Books for Teachers series: *Games for Children and The Internet and Young Learners*. He has now written a third in the series, entitled *'Teenagers'*. It is due for publication in May 2007. This particular group of language learners, defined in the book as between 12 and 17 or 'young and middle teenagers', is one which does not have many resource books dedicated to their learning needs in the classroom so *'Teenagers'* is a valuable and knowledgeably written addition to the narrow range of supplementary teaching materials available.

The book starts with a 'contents' overview which consists of columns with details of activities, levels, timing and aims. The activities are divided into three sections: 'Language-awareness', 'Creative and critical thinking tasks' and 'Teenager topics'. The activities in each section cover a wide and appealing content range, such as 'Street names', 'The Meaning of Dreams' and 'Save the Earth'. The levels are from beginner to upper-intermediate and above. The timings are clear and the aims are stated in terms of language, skills and functions.

The book continues with a sensitively written introduction in which the author describes the many physical, social and cognitive changes teenagers experience. An explanation is given of how these changes affect the learning environment, and 'classroom management tips' are offered. The author also highlights two important areas in language teaching in the 21st century, which no teacher can ignore: technology and content-based teaching. It is notable that the first words chosen to open the main section of the book are on research into 'bilingual studies'. Also included in the introduction is a useful table of level descriptors which reflects the 'can do' statements of the Common European framework (CEF).

The activities are varied and clearly explained. In the first section, many are used to focus teenagers' attention on the relationship between their first language and English. This is an excellent teaching strategy and one which encourages thinking skills. Throughout the book, the activities include new ideas, such as those in 'The Archaeologists' (1.1), 'The stock market' (2.13), 'Hybrid Sports' (3.1) as well as revisited ones, which have, as Alan Maley, the editor, states in his forward, a 'novel twist'. Examples are found in 'Word Association' (1.12), 'What if...?' (2.6) and 'Name that Celebrity' (3.4). Following the activities, there are suggestions for variations and follow-ups. Many of these will help teachers' develop ideas for supporting or extending teenagers' language. In addition to this, OUP will provide an accompanying website.

In *'Teenagers'* there are some assumptions: that a classroom culture of group and pair work exists, that speaking skills come easily to teenagers and that they are accustomed to responding to each others' work. In some second language learning contexts, however, this is not always the case. Teachers looking for 'advanced' level activities will find them under 'high intermediate' ones despite 'advanced' being described in a table at the start of the book. In all sections there are

some activities which try to cover the whole teenage age range from 12 to 17. Some activities should have perhaps been narrowed to 14 -17 as few 12 year olds have an 'upper-intermediate' level. In all three sections the levels are mixed but an index is included for locating activities appropriate to teenagers' needs.

'Teenagers' is a resource book I would very much recommend for all those working with this fascinating but often troubled group of language learners. Gordon Lewis clearly understands the issues facing adolescents and he offers ideas which will encourage, motivate and give them responsibility for their learning. Very much needed!

Kay Bentley is a teacher, teacher trainer, examiner, presenter and distance learning tutor, and Co-editor of YLSIG 'CATS'.

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Young Learners Special Interest Group e-discussion group

Wendy Arnold (Hong Kong)

Another dynamic start to the academic year with Alan Maley leading us in a discussion topic no. 1 on 'What price literacy?', which started in mid-October. By the time you read this, Alan's discussion summary should be safely filed in our website resources site for you to enjoy.

Alan led the discussion using 'leading' questions which took us from the position of 'literacy' in the age of digital and visual information flow; what new modes of literacy were evolving and the subsequent implications for language teachers; how to move learners from the initial stages of decoding to interpreting/fluent processing; our experience with Extensive Reading programmes; key factors for becoming a 'committed' reader; creative writing activity types; and asking why extensive reading, which many researchers have claimed is the single most effective way of acquiring and maintaining a language, is so little practiced.

We should also have enjoyed the next two planned fielded discussions for 2007:

Discussion no. 2 Andrew Wright
'Stories in language teaching' in January

Discussion no. 3 Jaynee Moon
'Children's L2 writing development : a neglected skill ? in February

More fielded discussions are planned but not yet confirmed.

Summaries of all our discussions are available on our website. Log on to <http://www.iatefl-yflsig.org> and go to web resources, discussion summaries. Or check out the following URL address for archived messages <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/>

We now have more than 460 e-discussion members, representing every single aspect of teaching English from grass roots teacher (both non-native and native speakers), researchers, writers, publishers etc. around the globe.

And onto why you should continue to be part of our e-discussion group or join it! Our discussion group comprises two kinds of discussions, proposed by our e-members and being ad hoc, or by invited 'experts' in their fields.

Our invited 'fielders' in 2006 included

Discussion no. 1 Shelagh Rixon
'Vocabulary' – January 2006

Discussion no. 2 Annie Hughes
'Realbooks' – February 2006

Discussion no. 3 Prof. Gordon Wells
'The relationship among action, talk and texts in learning and teaching' – February 2006

Discussion no. 4 Irena Köstenbauer
'CLIL in a natural language environment' – February 2006

Discussion no. 5 Dennis Newson
'Down with Grammar' – May 2006

Our own e-members have proposed the following ad hoc discussions:

- 1) using a picture dictionary
- 2) computers and flashcards
- 3) values/beliefs about reading
- 4) testing and assessment

So you can see the range of interests amongst our e-members is diverse and it's wonderful that so many pitch in to add their views. And don't forget if you have any 'burning questions' of your own, please DO SHARE. Often the most exciting impromptu discussions are started by our members questions!

Looking forward to some more 'voices' taking part in 2007. May 2007 be the most successful ever for the YLsig and English language teaching around the world in general.

Here's to a fabulous year of YLsig discussions! Hope to catch up with some of you at the IATEFL Conference in Aberdeen. Please do come and find me.

Wendy Arnold

Moderator YLsig e-discussions
<http://www.iatefl-yflsig.org> (resources)
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/younglearners/join> (discussions)
<http://80.60.224.77/moodle4/login/index.php> (classroom research projects)

Discussion of Action, Talk, and Text

Gordon Wells

University of California, Santa Cruz

During the week starting February 24, 2006, I had the pleasure of fielding the discussion on the Young Learners e-mail network on the theme of "the role of action, talk and text in learning-and-teaching." I had suggested reading some or all of the papers that I had selected from those on my webpage (references below) and offered the following Vygotskian aphorism as what I hoped would be a provocative opener:

Who we become depends on the company we keep and what we do and say together.

The messages that followed, which offered vignettes of past experiences, current challenges, and hopes for the future, certainly gave substance to my encapsulation of some of Vygotsky's most productive insights.

In my own work, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), building on Vygotsky's (1987 *inter alia*) work, provides the framework within which I conduct my research and plan my teaching, as is apparent from the articles I suggested as a basis for our discussion. CHAT offers some important principles for thinking about learning and teaching:

- The practical and intellectual skills and the knowledge we acquire are taken over from the communities of which we are members in the course of joint activities – doing things together.
- Language is an essential tool, or 'mediational means', for joint activities and it is through talk in the course of purposeful activities that we learn our first language.
- As learners take over and make their own the language(s) of the social group(s) to which they belong through the dialogue that accompanies the activities in which they engage with others, they also construct a resource for solo thinking in the dialogue of inner speech.
- Learning a second or subsequent language is similar in important respects to becoming literate; both involve learning a different but related system for communicating the thoughts and feelings that we first learned to communicate in our 'mother tongue'.
- As well as organizing activities that challenge learners to master the essential features of a discipline or second language, teaching involves providing assistance to students in their "zones of proximal development" – that is to say, in those aspects of particular tasks with which they are experiencing difficulty. Such assistance can be provided by fellow students as well as by the designated teacher.

These principles seem very relevant to the issues that were raised during our discussion.

One of the first topics to emerge, introduced by Naomi Gardiner, concerned the use of L1 in teaching L2/FL. This is clearly a contentious issue, particularly in countries like the US, where using the first language in class is thought by many to impede the learning of English. However, leaving politics aside, since we all make use of the known in order to come to understand and master the unknown, it is only natural that students should do the same in learning a second or foreign language. Furthermore, since the principal use of language – and the reason for learning it – is to communicate, it is better for those who can't cope in L2 to make use of alternative strategies (including L1) than to give up the attempt to communicate.

One classroom strategy I have seen to work is to ask a question or pose a problem in L2 and encourage groups of students to work together to come up with an answer using whatever means they have available and then to work together to formulate their answer in L2 in order to communicate it to the whole class.

A second issue of importance to many contributors concerned the emphasis that should be given to literacy in teaching a second or foreign language. In an earlier study that I carried out of children's learning of and through English as their first language (Wells, 1986), a major finding was that academic success at the end of the primary years was most strongly predicted by the frequency with which children had stories read to them in the preschool years. While this finding may be less relevant to cultures in which literacy is less valued (or, as was mentioned by Wendy Arnold, where the script is not based on alphabetic representation of speech), reading books in the second language that are well written and illustrated, and appropriate in content to the students' age, can provide another form of comprehensible and interesting input throughout the school years (see the earlier discussion with Stephen Krashen).

This thread also gave rise to an interesting discussion, initiated by Janice Bland, of what counts as 'literature' and whether this term is off-putting by suggesting restriction to the canon of classics. Whatever the term used, though, it was generally agreed that there is a wide range of excellent books written for young learners, both fiction and non-fiction, and that they should have a place in teaching a second or foreign language because they not only encourage students to read for

enjoyment but can also enrich the study of other school subjects, such as history and science, while contributing to the learning of the target language. Particularly important, as John Clegg emphasized, is the practice of talking about these books, both to explore their content and to draw attention to the characteristic genres and linguistic forms of written language. This is especially valuable where the second language is also the main language of instruction, as is the case for the children of many immigrant families.

As a natural continuation of the topic of literacy, the discussion moved on to consider the role of writing. Here again, participants emphasized the importance of 'writing for some purpose' rather than simply to produce well-formed sentences. Several ways in which students can be helped to generate their own purposes for writing were suggested, including collaboratively writing to report on a group project to the rest of the class or individually composing a story or informational text for 'publication'. Andrew Wright emphasized that students are more likely to pay attention to grammar, spelling and so on when they are writing for a real audience:

I have had queues of children wanting me to help them get the grammar right for their books because they knew the books would be on display in the local town library and knew that they would then go to the school library and be there for future generations to read

Interestingly, I find this to be equally true of adult writers, whether in their first or second language.

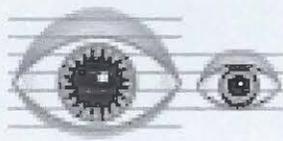
In proposing the initial readings for this week's discussion, I particularly wanted to draw attention to the close relationship between action and language. So often, the context for second or foreign language learning is just more language. But in life outside the classroom, much of our use of language occurs in the context of planning, engaging in, or reflecting on, actions in the lived-in world. People speak because they have something to contribute and others listen because they want to understand, in both cases in order that their shared activity can be successful. Several participants recognized this problem but, as Dennis Newson pointed out, administrative pressures to cover the course as set out make it difficult to find a place for action.

In the collaborative work I have done with teachers in several countries, in order to generate more occasions for purposeful dialogue, we have tried to plan the curriculum with an inquiry orientation, such that students are encouraged to ask 'real' questions about aspects of the topics they are studying and then to find ways of answering those questions through practical investigation as well as through library searches. One of my favorite topics is 'Time'. There are so many interesting questions to investigate, from the relationship between weight and the momentum of cars running down ramps, through the conventions of the 24 hour time zones, to the experienced pace of time when one is interested in something or just waiting. From the perspective of language learning, all these projects can lead to an investigation of the ways in which the different aspects of 'time' are expressed in the target language. I firmly believe that language learning becomes more interesting and effective when it can be linked to action of an exploratory kind.

Of course, for students to become inquirers who talk, read and write to find out more about the topics and questions that interest them, it is important for teachers to model the desired behavior, both by their ways of organizing life in the classroom and by themselves being inquiring educators. Those who took part in this on-line discussion are clearly committed inquirers who are seeking to understand and improve their practice and it has been my privilege to take part in this ongoing conversation. Thank you to all for your stimulating contributions.

Gordon Wells is a member of the Department of Education at the University of Santa Cruz

Web Watcher!



Hans Mol

In this spot we will check out interesting sites that could be useful in your EFL classroom.



Name Dfilm
Target Primary/Secondary
Users Teacher/Student
Type Interactive
Address

www.dfilm.com

(http://www.dfilm.com/index_movie_start.html)

Dfilm is an interactive website which allows you and your pupils to make their own cartoon movies. You have a choice of backgrounds, settings, music, characters and can decide what the characters say to each other. The programme plays back the movie, and allows users to send it to their friends. Quite a cute and effective way of creatively and actively reinforcing language learnt in the classroom. Pupils could either do this in your school's computer room or at home.



Name Cool Planet
Target Secondary (12-18)
Users Teacher/Student
Type Interactive
Address

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/kidsweb/index.htm>

Cool Planet for Kids is an Oxfam site which get children to look at, listen to and read stories by children from all over the world. There is also Cool Planet for teachers. An excellent site for the multi-cultural EFL classroom where you want your pupils to learn about other people in other countries, and how they can make a difference. Bring global issues to the classroom.

Hans Mol is a freelance materials author. He lives in Australia and is author of many EFL resources. He edits YL SIGs web resources pages. www.connexions.com.au



YL SIG pre-conference event @ IATEFL Aberdeen
Wednesday 18 April, 2007

Literacy in ELT

The role of the YL professional in developing reading and writing.

Literacy is an issue many YL professionals acknowledge but don't explore. Is literacy just reading and writing, and do we feature it enough in our approaches to teaching YLs? To what extent does the YL EFL teacher need to be aware of literacy? We will examine current issues surrounding literacy and the what, why and how of literacy in the FL environment from different perspectives. By the end of the day all participants will have considered strategies for addressing these areas in their classroom.

Plenary speakers



Jackie Holderness



Gordon Wells

Workshops and talks

David R. Hill ♦ AnnaMaria Pinter ♦ Shelagh Rixon ♦ Brian Tomlinson
♦ Annie Hughes ♦ Judy West on prediction, teachers' practice,
extensive reading, sequences, role of writing and more!

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