PREFACE

Introduction

Core books

Recommended books

Unit 1 Contexts and Issues in Teaching Young Learners

Unit 2 Children as Language Learners

Unit 3 Second Language Learning in the Classroom

Unit 4 Approaches to early L2 teaching

Unit 5 Resources and Activities for Young Learners

Unit 6 Literacy, Reading and writing

Unit 7 Language in the YL Classroom

Unit 8 Interaction in the YL classroom

Unit 9 Course and Syllabus Design

Unit 10 Assessment and Evaluation

May 2008
Introduction

Welcome to the up-dated Teaching Young Learners module!

Many people have been involved in writing this module. The original version was the work of Nikki Dereboy, Paula da Nagy (International House), Sue Garton and Jane Willis, who was also the co-ordinator and the editor. The version you are reading now has been extensively rewritten by Rita Balbi (thank you, Rita!), and edited by Fiona Copland. We would like to thank all these contributors and also Oz Powles, who has formatted the work, Virginia Soriano-Chico, who looks after all administrative tasks involved with the module, and Caroline Long, our librarian, who has worked hard to track down paper and digital copies of many of the books and articles referred to here.

In the time between the publishing of the two versions of this module, interest in teaching young learners has grown. So too has the number of contexts in which children are taught and the kind of classes that children are taught in. However, research about teaching young learners has not grown in line with this increased interest: indeed, we sometimes struggled to find relevant, up-to-date research for some of the topics and issues which emerged as particularly pertinent to teaching the young. We persevered, nonetheless, and are proud of the module, which endeavours to ensure that the academic informs the professional, which informs the academic.

Re-writing this module has convinced us that TYL course participants have a great deal to offer the community of teachers involved in teaching young learners. The classroom based research which we hope you will embark on for your assignment is of interest to many and can be shared with others at conferences and in journals. We would urge you to do this: the field of young learners is under-represented in the literature and so runs the risk of being marginalised as a discipline. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that our professional work rests on a strong theoretical base, a base we have all constructed.

About this module

This module takes you on a journey from macro perspectives, for example, what young learners have in common, to more micro perspectives, for example, course design for particular groups of learners. We hope there is a balance of theoretical perspectives and practical ideas but as ever, we would welcome your feedback on this balance and indeed on any other aspect of the module. Our aim is to inform and to inspire and perhaps we will only know if this has been achieved when we start to work with you on your assignments.

Tasks

You will find two main types of task in the module:

- The first type will be of a practical or reflective nature. They will invite you, for example, to pause and consider how what has been said in the unit relates to a specific context, or to go back to some data and analyse it. On occasion, you may be asked, or may wish, to record a section of your classroom for analysis. Going through this process is valuable practice for your assignment, as it is likely that you will wish to include some classroom data in this.
The second type will be reading tasks. They usually suggest that you read about an issue that has arisen from the unit itself. You will, no doubt, find further reading reference relevant to your own context and you may wish to follow these up. Whenever you find something of particular relevance to the unit, please do let us know.

Ethics

Children are vulnerable and for this reason it is important that ethical issues are taken into consideration at all stages of this module, but particularly when you start to plan your assignment: we would urge you to discuss these with your tutor. A copy of the Ethics Form can be found on Blackboard and the Ethics Podcast, which offers useful guidance, is also available there.

Reading

We have tried to restrict both core and recommended books to those that many of you will already have at home or in your workplace. The library has multiple copies of all these and, as you know, can send them to you if you wish. Some are on the library’s ‘Elibrary’ site. Most are also readily available from bookshops and internet sites: the only exception to this is the Moon and Nikolov book: Research into Teaching English to Young Learners, which is published by University Press Pécs. If you wish to purchase this book, you must contact the editors directly at nikolov@btk.pte.hu. You will be glad to know that it is very reasonably priced!

Articles from journals for each unit are either on Blackboard or can be easily accessed using your Athens account. If you have problems, then please contact Caroline Long on C.A.Long@aston.ac.uk

Core books

- **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P.

Recommended books

- **Halliwell, S.** 1992 Teaching English in the Primary Classroom. Longman
- **Lightbown, P. and Spada N.** 2006. *How Languages are Learned* OUP. Third edition.
- **McKay, P.** 2006. *Assessing Young Language Learners*. C.U. P.
• **Pinter, M.** 2006. *Teaching Young Language Learners*. O.U.P.
• **Sharpe, K.** 2001. *Modern Foreign Languages in the primary school*. Kogan Page
Contents

Goals
Reading

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Contexts for children learning English

1.3 Issues affecting early language learning
   1.3.1 The age debate
   1.3.2 Proficiency and Cumulative time
   1.3.3 Other factors

1.4 Choosing appropriate goals for children’s courses

1.5 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Goals

The purpose of this unit is to provide an introduction to the whole module through the presentation and initial analysis of some of the key issues involved in teaching English to young learners.

By the end of this unit you should:

- Be able to identify the different contexts in which children learn English and their characteristics
- Be able to describe the context in which you are teaching and analyse its advantages and disadvantages
- Be aware of the complexity and interplay of the issues related to the expansion of early English
- Be aware of some of your beliefs about children as language learners.

Reading

Core reading


Recommended reading

1.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a world-wide tendency to bring forward the age at which young people start to learn a foreign language, although the age at which this becomes part of the compulsory curriculum still varies widely. With the obvious exception of English speaking countries, this trend has often been accompanied by a shift from there being different foreign languages in the curriculum, for instance the language of a neighbouring country, to there being English as the main or indeed even the only option available.

The main reason for the above development is well known: the present unique role of English in international communication in all sectors of adult life and its influence on both educational policies and parental preference. Governments and families share the aspiration for new generations to be able to function without difficulty in an international dimension and consider competence in English as an indispensable condition for this. In fact, according to a British Council estimate reported in the online magazine “i-osmosis”, nearly half of the population in the world will be speaking English either as first or second language or as a tool for international communication by 2015. Besides, English is not only valued for its utilitarian function but also for “the prestige attached to it and the social role attributed to it” (Truchot, 2002: 21). As a result, countries “need to revisit their language policies to ensure that their people have adequate linguistic resources to participate in the various processes. This involves decisions about the official language of the country,
the working language to be adopted and the allocation of resources for language learning”. (Tsui, 2005: 42).

Of course, there are different points of view about this issue, and not everyone sees the global expansion of English as a positive development (those of you who have read Pennycook, 1994 in your FND studies will be aware of the debate surrounding what is sometimes called ‘linguistic imperialism’). The Council of Europe, too, clearly perceives a danger in the hegemonic position of English: English “holds the first place among foreign languages offered in the curriculum, in almost all member States of the Council of Europe (outside the English-speaking countries)... this development is irreversible and it presents a certain danger to the concept of European language policy, since it might lead to a reduction – or even extinction – of language diversity in Europe” (Neuner, 2002:10). A different concern is expressed by Sze (undated) who points to the problem in teaching foreign languages to very young children in situations in which there is shortage of qualified staff for this delicate task.

In spite of the doubts, the widely perceived necessity of competence in English combined with the generally accepted belief that an early start is one of the keys to success in various fields and especially foreign languages, has led to a situation characterized by a progressive lowering of the age at which children start to learn English. Thus in many parts of the world tuition in English is provided as early as possible unless there are serious political and cultural objections and, sometimes, notwithstanding them. (Tsui, 2005)

As I am more familiar with the situation in Europe than in other parts of the world, I’ll focus on what is happening in Europe, while inviting you to reflect on how this may relate to your particular context.

Examples of the trend in Europe are the introduction of English at age three in Spain and English as part of the compulsory curriculum from age six in Italy. The situation in some Asian countries seems to be going in a similar direction: “… since the turn of the century, English learning has started at an earlier age, for example, in primary three in China, Japan, and South Korea; in China, some private schools start teaching English as early as kindergarten or primary one” (Tsui, 2005: 44). Sze (ibid: 52) suggests an even starker reality: “That EFL teaching in Hong Kong has always started at P1 officially, and at kindergarten in reality, has been a response to parental desire rather than an action based on theories of child language development”. Djiwandono (2004) articulates some parents’ attitudes towards the role of English in their children’s education.

**Task 1** will help you to reflect on the spread of English in education with reference to the country in which you work.
Task 1

- Read the following text from Truchot, C. “Key Aspects of the use of English in Europe”, Language Policy Division, Council of Europe 2002, page 8.

- Write a paragraph to say how, according to your experience and knowledge, the text reflects a TYL context with which you are familiar.

In western Europe the teaching of English has become the general rule, and all pupils now learn English. This situation has come about at different rates depending on the country and its specific circumstances and first made its appearance in the countries of northern Europe, the Netherlands and the German-speaking countries. The trend spread to France and then to all the southern European countries. According to a recent Eurydice study (2001) covering 29 countries, nine of them, including the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, and several German Länder, have made the learning of English compulsory. In the others, the obligation to learn a foreign language, in conjunction with the widespread introduction of English teaching, gives English a quasi-compulsory status, albeit one that differs on the political and cultural front.

English courses are getting longer in nearly all countries. Language learning in primary school (children under 11) is an ancient tradition in central and eastern Europe. Northern European countries have organised it on a large scale since the 1970s. It became the general rule in all non-English-speaking countries of the European Union in the 1990s. In all cases it has been or is about to be made compulsory, with learning starting between seven and ten years of age. The early learning of languages has benefited English almost exclusively. The only other language taught to any significant degree is French but even here only 4% of the school population is reached. The share of the other languages is too small to appear in the statistics.

While English and other languages are still competing in central and eastern Europe, such competition has virtually ceased in western Europe. The other languages are taught when the curricula include a second or third language (FL 2) but their place is much smaller than that of English.

Before concluding this section, and in order to avoid possible misunderstandings or ambiguities as we move on, it is useful to observe that

- The term “early” means different ages in different countries as in each country it is generally used to mean “earlier than before.”
For the purpose of this module, Young Learners (YLs) will refer to children from the ages to four to twelve, even if nowadays children as young as three are being formally introduced to English.

Lastly, a number of ELT organizations such as RSA/UCLES and the IATEFL SIG (Special Interest Group) refer also to younger teenagers as “Young learners”.

1.2 Contexts for children learning English

Without entering the debate of world Englishes, the three circle framework proposed by Kachru, which you also met in the FND, can be of help in describing the most common situations in which children whose first language is not English may be learning the language. It is worth reminding ourselves of Kachru’s framework:

1. The **inner circle** refers to the countries where English is the primary language and includes UK, USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The institutional opportunities of exposure to English may be defined in terms of ESL or ESOL, bilingual instruction and various forms of immersion.

   **ESL** (English as a second language) and **ESOL** (English to speakers of other languages) refer to the situations in which children receive instruction aimed at the acquisition of English, with a primary focus on grammar, vocabulary and communication. (August and Hakuta, 1998).

   **Bilingual instruction** is the provision of instruction in school settings through the medium of two languages, usually a native and a second language; the amount of instruction delivered in each language varies according to the type of project and the goals of the programme. Examples of this are the two-way bilingual programmes in the U.S. where Hispanic children learning English receive part of their instruction in English (and children who are native speakers of English learn Spanish in the same way). A number of children in the UK also receive bilingual education in state funded schools. In this model, classroom teachers, who are usually, but not always, monolingual, are supported by either English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers (who, like classroom teachers, are fully qualified) or Teaching Assistants (who usually hold no or limited qualifications). If you are interested in this area of language teaching, then Martin-Jones and Saxena, 2003 and Creese and Martin, 2003 are good places to start.

   **Immersion education** takes place when children, usually from different language backgrounds, are taught English through sheltered subject instruction in English. In this situation teachers adopt facilitating devices such as visuals, graphic organizers, repetition and extension of utterances to convey meaning and at the same time expose the children to comprehensible input. (Teicher, 2001)
In these three situations the teacher or teachers are generally native speakers and in the case of bilingual instruction the speakers of other languages enjoy also the benefit of being in the same classes of native speaker children.

The situations just described refer to children living in English speaking countries, while for young learners, coming from abroad and spending a limited period of time in one of these countries in order to improve their English skills, there is an ever growing offer of private courses.

The term **ELD** (English Language Development) is sometimes used in the U.S. to indicate any programme aimed at the acquisition of English by immigrants. Gersten and Baker (2001) look at this new term as a way to indicate that the focus is on the communicative function of the language as used outside the classroom rather on the learning of formal structures.

2. The **outer or extended circle** includes the countries, former colonies, where English is used as a second language in a generally multilingual setting. In these places English is sometimes referred to as an additional language.

   Children in these countries receive part or all their instruction in English and develop their competence in English mainly through school subjects; some of them may already have been exposed to English as a second language in the family environment. The extent and quality of the exposure varies according to the areas and tends to be stronger in towns and weaker in remote country regions. Other differences are caused by the social status of the family and its general education level. **ESL** is needed in many cases and may be provided in the school setting.

   There are both native and non native teachers in the schools of these countries.

   English can be learnt also in private schools offering courses for children and in this case the teachers tend to be native or native-like.

3. The **expanding circle** involves the countries where English is a foreign language and does not have any special status or function within the countries themselves for example, Germany and Spain. However these countries acknowledge the importance of English to communicate with both native and non native speakers.

   In expanding circle countries, children learn English as a foreign language. This generally takes place in the school setting where English (as the only FL offered or one among an option of various languages) is part of the ordinary curriculum. The goals range from just “sensitizing” the children to a language different from their own to acquiring some degree of communicative competence.

   Private language schools also may offer courses for children.
International schools. In most of the countries of the so-called expanding circle there are a limited number of international schools that use English as the working language for the teaching of the whole curriculum or part of it. Some of these schools also offer EFL as introduction and/or support to the tuition of the other subjects in English.

English weeks, English summer camps. These initiatives provide an intense, although short, exposure to English through the use of this language as the working language for a variety of activities such as games, sport, art, music etc.. The idea underlying these experiences is that of creating an immersion in the target language for learners for whom going abroad is still considered premature.

In private schools, international schools and summer camps, teachers are native or native-like while in state primary schools in many countries, the deliverer is generally a primary teacher with an often limited command of the target language and perhaps no training in the teaching of a foreign language at the time of entering the profession. (This is partly changing in some countries as, for example, Germany and Italy where FLs are becoming part of the primary teachers’ initial training.) The lack of official qualifications is often compensated by strong motivation and enthusiasm for coping with the challenge of teaching a subject still perceived as new and different from the others and by special in-service programmes aimed at the development of the teachers’ communicative and/or methodological competence. Secondary school teachers generally possess specific qualifications for the teaching of English.

The presence of native speaker children attending the same school or course is rare in these countries except in the case of international schools where they are often, although not always, present; a more recent trend is that of the presence of children from countries of the outer circle in classes in countries of the expanding circle as a result of the increasing immigration from the latter to those of the former that seem to provide opportunities for better life standards.

Task 2 will help you to consider your micro context.

Task 2

Answer the following questions:

- What is the status that English has in your society?
- Why is English taught to children in your country?
- What are the characteristics of the learning environment where you teach? (if you teach children). How do these characteristics differ from other contexts in your country?

Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008
While the aim of Task 1 was to reflect on the status of English in various countries, the focus of Task 2 is on individual teaching contexts within the same country. Have you discovered any positive aspects of your situation? Any difficulties? Any challenges?

A final remark may be useful to give a more precise picture; as stated above, the terms ESL, ESOL and EFL indicate situations in which the learners are not native speakers and attend courses with the primary aim of learning the language. However, when referred to children, they seldom imply just “explicit” teaching of the target language as ESL, ESOL and EFL courses for young learners are often either content-based or topic-based. This is increasingly the case with adults too, especially where English is taught as a second or additional language. After considering the variety of situations in which children may be learning English, we now move to dealing with some of the factors influencing their learning.

1.3 Issues affecting early language learning

Teaching English to young learners is not as easily done as said. This contrasts with the generally held view that children are good, fast language learners. Adults often remember their own sometimes painstaking and unrewarding efforts to learn a language at secondary school or later in life and then compare their struggles to the seemingly effortless fluency of young bilingual children. They then conclude that the earlier children start to learn a language, the better. However, such a view negates the reality of language learning for most children, where affective factors and quality and quantity of input play hugely important roles. As you may remember from Unit 4 of FND, age is not the only factor leading to success in this field.

With the above considerations, of course, I neither mean to question the evidence that children have a great potential for language learning, as demonstrated by the experience of the many countries where bilingualism is the norm, nor quench your enthusiasm for teaching children. I would just like to draw your attention to three fundamental issues:

- the complexity of the role of age in language learning
- the complexity of the factors that make early learning possible and worthwhile
- the distinction between acquisition and instruction contexts.

The following section will help you to explore your experiences and beliefs and also some of the research findings in relation to the above issues.

1.3.1 The age debate

Establishing a starting age is a policy decision for school managers and ministers of education and, as we saw in section 1.1, many countries have, for a variety of historical, political and educational reasons, decided to reduce the age at which
schools begin to teach English to their students. In many cases, children as young as 4 or 5 are being taught English in school. With reference to this situation, we wish now to consider the impact of the starting age on language achievement so that you can make informed choices with regard to this issue.

We will start from your experience and then move to consider some of the research in this area.

**Task 3**

Answer the following questions:

- If you have ever taught children, what was the age of the youngest you taught? What problems did he/she encounter? What problems did you encounter?

- In your opinion, at which age should children be introduced to an FL? Give reasons for your choice.

- If you have ever taught groups of teenagers or adults including both students who had started English before the age of twelve and students who had not, did you notice any difference in their attitudes and competence? If you did, can you think of any reason?

If you are interested in other teachers’ opinions and experiences, read Appendix A

- According to Robinson (1998:3) “some evidence suggests that adults initially learn faster than children, but the levels of ultimate attainment are much lower in adults, especially in phonology and areas of complex syntax”. How does this statement reflect your experience of learners?

For sure there is more than one answer to the above questions. I would reply to the third that the earlier starters were at advantage for listening comprehension and had a wider vocabulary range; however, I did not notice a correlation between “appropriacy” and the starting age. As for pronunciation, only some (not all) of those who had had a native speaker teacher seemed to perform better, a difference which would make an intriguing research project!

It is now time to approach some of the research on this issue. A preliminary consideration is that the interest of researchers was often to either confirm or question Lenneberg’s critical period hypothesis (CPH). According to this, at the time of puberty there is a dramatic decline in language learning capacity due to the
completion of the brain lateralization process. Another very popular research area is directed at comparing children’s language acquisition abilities with those of adults in relation to the achievement of native-like competence, especially in the area of phonology (see also Johnson and Newport, 1989 and Moyer, 1999). However, our concern here is to look at age as a factor with reference to a range of areas and in combination with other variables, as our core readings show.

For an in-depth discussion of the scientific evidence for and against the CPH, with reference to various aspects of language learning, an interpretation of the evidence in relation to different learning conditions, and a discussion of the characteristics of younger and older learners please consult Johnstone (2002). Our aim here is to identify how insights from research can contribute improved language instruction.

**Task 4**

- Read Johnstone, 2002 noting two things in his study that are a confirmation of your experience and two things you take issue with.

- Reflect upon the following statement from his paper:

  *Initially CPH focused mainly on speech (native-like accent) but in recent years has been extended to embrace other aspects of language competence such as grammar (particularly morphology and syntax), opening up the possibility that there may not be one “critical period” which applies at the one time “across the board” but that different aspects of language competence may go through different periods which are particularly sensitive for their development.* (page 7)

  Compare the conclusions in Johnstone’s study with those in Sze’s. (See core reading).

With reference to Johnstone’s statement in the previous task, my experience would suggest that given the appropriate conditions, younger learners are more likely to acquire a good command of the pronunciation of the target language, however without losing this ability all of a sudden. As for the other aspects of language competence, with the exception of very young learners, I have noticed that, to a certain extent, they may be more likely to be influenced by other factors such as cognitive development and social environment than age. In other words, an educated 12 year old student may grasp grammar more easily than a poorly literate older person. Another general comment I would make is that if the ability to pick up the target language pronunciation seems to decline and flatten with the advancement of age, the cognitive skills supporting the acquisition of the knowledge of the language system are not subject to a CPH and seem to be stable or even increase with the
advancement of age. However I would need to investigate these ideas further before I could make any claims.

The extension of the CPH to second language learning is considered controversial in Marinova-Todd and al (2002); the argument to support this point of view is that, even if older learners seem to be less proficient language learners, a careful examination of studies on the age factor reveals that age differences actually derive from differences in the learning situations and not from learning ability. If young age exerts an influence on language learning, it is primarily because “it is associated with social, psychological, educational and other factors that can affect L2 proficiency, not because of any critical period that limits the possibility of language learning by adults” (ibid: 28). The final part of the paper looks at the way these factors are related to language learning and suggests how they are best addressed to promote high achievement in the classroom situation. (This too, is one of the core readings for this unit!).

Serious doubts about the existence of a life period when language acquisition can take place without effort and with the assurance of high levels of achievement are expressed in Nikolov (2000) on the basis that “the variety of contexts and variables make it hard to claim that age is one of the independent variables”. Besides, both the internal and the external validity of many research projects may be problematic; with reference to the former it is hard to tell if there are factors other than age affecting the outcome (for example “intensity of course, methodology, teacher”); with reference to the latter “it is almost impossible to predict to what extent results may be applicable outside the actual research context” (ibid: 22).

The contribution of a stimulating and rich environment in both first – and second language acquisition is considered more influential than age in Clark (undated). As far as I was able to see, she is one of the few authors admitting that “even those who begin to learn a second language in childhood may always have difficulty with pronunciation, rules of grammar, and vocabulary, and they may never completely master the forms or uses of the language” (ibid.: 183).

With regard to the optimum age debate, it is also interesting to note that while most authors would agree on a decline in the language learning potential with the progressive advancement of age, ascribed either to physical reasons or to the interplay of other factors, there is no general consensus about the ideal starting age. Lenneberg (1967) defines the age of two as the time of the onset of the maximum language learning potential, while Singleton (2005) argues that language development starts at the time of birth and even before. Twyford (1988) supports the view that in general the 8 – 12-year-olds are potentially better L2 learners than the 4 to 7 year-olds:
“Although this younger group has no trouble learning a second language in natural settings, they do seem slower to respond to formal language instruction in school than older learners: It can be expected that as they move into the stage of cognitive development that permits socialized speech, their openness to educational intervention will increase” (ibid: 2).

Robinson (1998) would look at age six as the beginning of the “critical period” for a second language.

Task 5

At this point you might ask yourself whether becoming familiar with the literature on the optimum starting age has changed your original opinion about when to introduce children to foreign language instruction.

Take note of the aspects you had not thought of before and that, in your opinion, enhance the effectiveness of early language teaching.

As conclusion to this section I would point out that, even if young age per se does not guarantee success in L2 learning, we know that children are potentially high achievers (although the reasons supporting this view are not the same for all researchers). Besides, primary school is assumed to be the best context for foreign language learning in an instructional setting. At this level “the mother tongue gale”, a colourful expression to describe the sometimes interfering influence of L1, “can be reduced by appropriate pedagogy more significantly than in other school grades”. (Sharp, 2001: 38). If we want to take full advantage of this promising situation I would suggest that the following are borne in mind:

- The full immersion situation and the instruction situation are not identical and what happens in the classroom is generally unlike the learning which occurs during immersion; consequently early instruction does not necessarily produce the same level of attainment as that of early immersion (Singleton, 2005).
- Unrealistic expectations about children’s attainment without paying attention to the learning conditions may lead to great disappointment: in fact, the outcome of an early programme depends on the way it is implemented and not on the age factor alone.
- Language achievement is affected by individual differences that explain why learners of the same age respond in different ways both to language immersion and language instruction and consequently question the automatic acceptance of the earlier the better axiom. “People of the same age do not share all the same characteristics. We can speak of a typical six-year-old or an average fifteen year-old, but we have to keep in mind that a norm or an ideal may be as much fiction as fact in the real world… Second, there is no uniform pattern that everyone follows… Knowledge and skill are acquired by each of us according to a highly individual map” (Twyford, 1988:1).
Learning at different childhood stages is enhanced by different strategies (teaching a five-year-old class is not the same as teaching an eleven-year-old class!)

1.3.2 Proficiency and cumulative time

While most research work on the age issue aims at identifying if children learn more or better than older learners, the relationship between starting time and cumulative time with reference to second language proficiency is seldom considered. The advantage of early starters over older starters by the age of fourteen is maintained by Johnstone who, at the same time, implicitly acknowledges that the progress of young children especially in the school situation is slow. “If young beginners at age 5 are compared with older beginners at age 10 then after one year the older group are likely to be ahead: However, if both groups are compared at (say) age 14, then the younger beginners stand a better chance of being ahead, in part because of the greater amount of time available overall.” (Ibid: 12).

Task 6

An early start generally produces an increase in the cumulative exposure time to the target language in the instructional setting.

- Do you think that cumulative exposure time results in a higher level of achievement? Support your view with data from your experience.

With reference to the above, Murphy (undated) describes four possible models that “present somewhat contradictory representations of the relationship between time and L2 acquisition” (ibid: 7). They are:

1. the “incremental model” showing a direct linear relationship between time and level of proficiency and indirectly envisaging an advantage for early starters;
2. the “older-age sensitivity model” suggesting that cumulative time independent of starting age does not predict the ultimate level of proficiency;
3. the “nonlinear model” suggesting that there is no strong correlation between cumulative time and achieved proficiency;
4. the “learning plateau mode” indicating that there are diminishing returns in the relationship of time to level of proficiency.

This last item suggests that there is also a case to be made for curtailing language instruction after a particular length of time. We should also consider how language instruction is delivered: for example would it be better to have it for two hours a week for five years or four hours a week for two or three years?
The relationship between proficiency and cumulative time is also obviously affected by what happens after the years of early EFL instruction. If you are interested in this issue, which is beyond the scope of this module, read Cameron, 2003.

### 1.3.3 Other factors

The discussion about age has already introduced other issues and by now you have probably noticed that learning is affected both by political and institutional decisions taken outside the classroom as well as the way the teaching is delivered in the classroom. And this is the level at which each of us can make things better or worse.

### Task 7

The aim of this task is to encourage you to reflect on your own language learning process and, in doing so, focus on some potentially useful strategies.

Answer the following questions:

- At which age / ages did you start to learn a second language / languages?
- Do you remember how you felt about this experience at the time? How do you feel now?
- If you have learnt more than one language, which do you think you know better? What has helped you to maintain ascendancy in this language?
- On the basis of your experience, note down one strategy you would use when teaching children and one strategy you would not use.

If possible, exchange your ideas about the latter point with a colleague or send a message to the discussion list to elicit suggestions or provide food for thought.

### Task 8

The aim of this task is to help you to reflect on your experience of young learners of English.

If you teach young learners,

- Describe their attitudes to second/foreign language learning
- Compare your descriptions with those in Appendix B
• Do you notice any differences between younger and older children?

If you find it useful, use the following grid.

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If you do not teach children, interview some colleagues who do, or ask the discussion list.

If you have experience of children being brought up in a bilingual family, can you describe any differences in the acquisition of English between these children and those you meet at school? Is there anything of the former situation that could be extended or adapted to the latter?

The above tasks have probably made you aware (or more aware) of the fact that acquiring/learning a new language is not just a “linguistic” matter but it reflects the interplay of a great variety of factors: age, cognitive development, affective factors, learning conditions (both goals and quantity and quality of exposure; opportunities of interaction etc.), motivation. All these aspects will be dealt with in following units. In terms of motivation, there seems to be a contrast between the instrumental and,
sometimes integrative reasons why parents and education policies push in the direction of early English and why children learn it. In fact, whoever has taught children knows that it is intrinsic motivation derived from enjoyable lessons and being successful, that has the power of sustaining them in their learning efforts!

To the factors just mentioned we could add perceptual abilities, knowledge of the world, degree and quality of literacy, self-image and whatever your experience may suggest. We should also keep in mind that generalizations are often misleading as, in real life, totally homogeneous groups do not exist and each learner brings his/her own personal characteristics to the English class. In future units, you will often be invited to observe individual learners in order to find out what approaches and strategies work best for each of them.

1.4 Choosing appropriate goals for children’s courses

The previous section was a general overview of some of the factors that have an impact on early language learning and this section is concerned with some of the implications connected with the choice of appropriate goals for YLs’ courses. If it is difficult to define adults’ linguistic needs, it is almost impossible to anticipate the specific uses to which today’s children will put their English. The best we can do is to limit ourselves to a very broad statement: in order to be able to function in a globalized world, the more our children know the better. We hope that today’s YLs will be high achievers, able to take advantage of the international opportunities that now lie before them. Task 9 aims to open up a discussion regarding the goals of early English.

Task 9

This task will help you to reflect on the challenges involved in defining aims and objectives for early foreign language learning.

What are the implications of the following views for YL course aims and objectives?

- early English should focus on the “the basics” to prepare young learners for future studies
- early English opens children’s minds to another language and, perhaps culture, regardless of achievements in communicative competence
- the language content should suit the children’s interests regardless of their future language needs

Which most closely reflects your own point of view, or do you hold a different viewpoint?
If possible, exchange your ideas with a colleague or send a message to the discussion list.

Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008
Probably none of the views in Task 9 makes you perfectly happy and you might wonder about the exact meaning of such terms as a “basics” or “open children’s minds”. However, trying to identify your position, you may have realized that the expansion of English at primary level poses a lot of questions besides the obvious one about how to teach young learners.

**Task 10**

Part 1

Different courses in the same country may have different learning goals. When English is part of the general curriculum there is sometimes the tendency to consider the general educational objectives achievable through an FL, for instance getting to know another country, as important as (or even more important than) the acquisition of competence in the target language. Private language schools, on the other hand, generally prioritise the ability to communicate.

- Which of these two perspectives prevails in the courses you are familiar with?
- Which would you support?

Part 2

The teaching of foreign languages to all pupils and not just the more academically gifted is seen as a more just distribution of linguistic power by Hawkins (1999). In his view, the advantages of this situation are that in this way all children are put in a position to

- reflect on their first language: some sort of comparison between L1 and L2 inevitably takes place sooner or later independent of the approach followed
- revisit concepts such as numbers, date and time already approached in their first language; this supports children who are struggling with such concepts in L1 without giving them the impression of having to repeat the same things over and over again
- learn to listen: a good deal of learning requires strong aural skills, which listening to an L2 helps to develop
- learn to learn languages
- experience an awakening to languages so that they see language differences as interesting and not threatening. The foreign language classroom is in fact the place where pupils are challenged to go to meet, with growing confidence, what is new and what might appear strange in language behaviours and in cultural values. What is more, introducing children to alternative ways of
expressing themselves and to different cultures generally broadens their minds and gives them the opportunity to communicate with many more people.

Do you agree that all children should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language?

Which of the above benefits would you consider a priority goal for YLs? Which would you consider realistically achievable in a course you are familiar with? Why?

We will go back to discussing linguistic aims and objectives in later units. For the moment it is enough to point out that:

- The objectives for children learning English as a second language are likely to be generally more demanding than those for children living in countries where English is not spoken. This is probably due to the fact that, in the former, YLs are expected to be able to function in a native-like manner in the life sectors appropriate for their age while in the latter, early English is generally viewed as a preparatory stage in assuring a high level of competence later in life.
- There should be coherence between expected outcomes and resources including in this term whatever has an impact on the quality and quantity of the teaching delivered.
- Both unrealistic expectations and too narrow goals are extreme positions to be avoided.

Before going further it may be worth just having a quick glance at the development of the concept of the aims of language teaching that has taken place in the last two centuries. When foreign languages were introduced into school curricula, they were seen mainly as a vehicle to access literary texts. It was only half way through the twentieth century that communicating in an FL came to be considered the main purpose of language teaching (even if this was not necessarily followed by common practice!). This explains why at present there is a general trend towards prioritising instrumental objectives, at least in adult courses, and, with reference to YLs, this shift poses the question of the balance between expected linguistic outcome and other educational goals.

1.5 Looking ahead

The aim of this section is to invite you to become aware of the steps of your journey in the world of EYL. Before going further you are advised to plan ways to make the most of your study. For instance you could go back to Unit 4 of FND and consider writing a journal, or you could decide to attend a YL conference while taking the module. In any case try to identify areas you would like to explore in more depth either because they are not clear yet or because they interest you in a special way.
What about writing down three things you wish to remember from this unit?

Any ideas about your assignment yet?

This unit has dealt with matters of language policy and has included a general overview of the aspects to consider when teaching English to young learners. May be some of you have found it a bit too “far away” from the “chalk face” but I think that the exploration of these issues is worthwhile to avoid looking at the classroom as completely detached from our present reality. It is also important that we are able to see our teaching and learning situation within a broader political context: what we do in class is in part determined by decisions made nationally and trends happening internationally. The following chapters will focus mainly on the language classroom as a favourable opportunity for learning, from a research perspective.

Unit two will address first language acquisition and its implications for second language learning. Chapter 1 of Moon (2005) and chapter 1 of Cameron (2001) will be a good preparation as they deal with some of the topics covered in this unit and anticipate some of those you will find in unit 2.

**References**

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Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008


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- **Strevens, P.** 1977. *New Orientations in the teaching of English*. OUP.


**Appendix A**

**British Council Talk questions Teaching absolute beginners. Teaching very young learners – question from Leina, Brazil.** See


**Appendix B**
It is the universal experience of language teachers that young children (say, age 6–13) display different characteristics from older learners: They bring to language learning an initial enthusiasm and assumption of success; they tend to learn easily and unself-consciously; they are inordinately cast down by failure and buoyed up by success; they have a short attention-span; they are quickly fatigued; they are easily bored and almost as easily re-animated; they mimic easily and make unfamiliar sounds with enjoyment and without embarrassment; they are relatively untroubled by making errors in public; cannot see their learning in terms of eventual usefulness; they are deeply affected by their relations with the teacher; their self esteem, and in consequence their expectation of personal success, is easily bruised; at their best they can be a joy to be with and teach, but at their worst they can become sullen non-learners. (From Strevens, P. 1977, “New Orientations in the teaching of English”, OUP, page 17)

The well-established notion that it is an advantage to start young may perhaps be converted into social reality only if syllabuses, materials and methods for the age-group are re-examined. ... In particular, one may ask this question:

Is a communicative approach to L2 learning likely to be unsuitable to Primary Pupils if their exact needs for it are not foreseeable?

It is argued here that the answer should be No... Infants communicate before they speak, and to the young child it is unnatural, and cognitively difficult to abstract language from the purposes for which it is used... a selective basis for communicative syllabus or materials can be sought in the children’s experience of communicating in L1, adapted to the rest of the curriculum in character and content. Language-teaching to young children cannot simply be a reflex of the socio-linguistic profile of the wider community, or of adult estimates of their future needs.

From Jane Moon, 2005 “Children learning English”, Macmillan Heinemann, page 6

Children learning a foreign language often use complete phrases of language they have picked up from someone else, e.g. I don’t know, knock it off, come on, goodbye....Children may not have been taught these chunks formally, but they help them to communicate when they have very little language. Later they may begin to break down these phrases and recombine the words in new ways. For example, in the beginning a child may just use the phrase I don’t know. Later he/she may begin to realize that this can be combined with other bits of language, e.g. I don’t know his name, I don’t know spelling. Later he/she may begin to change other parts of the phrase, e.g. we don’t know, they don’t know and at a later stage he/she may begin to realize that the verb changes according to the subject, e.g. he doesn’t know.

Children are generally less able to give selective and prolonged attention to features of learning tasks than adults, and are more easily diverted and distracted by other pupils. When faced with talk in the new language, they try to understand it in terms of the grammar and salient cues of their first language and also pay particular attention to items of L2 vocabulary that they are familiar with. (From Cameron L. 2001, “Teaching Languages to Young Learners”, C.U.P., page 15)


In this section, find out how 4 - 6 year old children learn and develop.

http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59462&docid=146642

In this section, find out how 7 - 9 year old children learn and develop.

http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59462&docid=146643

In this section, find out how 10 - 12 year old children learn and develop.

http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59462&docid=146644
TYL Unit 2
Children as Language Learners

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Teachers’ Beliefs

2.3 The Observable Features of Early Language Development

2.4 Children’s Language Learning Environments

2.5 Cognitive Development and Language Learning
   2.5.1 Behaviourism
   2.5.2 The Behaviourist Position Applied to Language Learning
   2.5.3 The Innatist Position
   2.5.4 Cognitive Psychology and Constructivist Theories
   2.5.5 Piaget – The Child as a Lone Scientist
   2.5.6 Vygotsky – The child making sense within a social context

2.6 Summary and Discussion

2.7 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Goals

This unit aims to focus on how children acquire their first language and the implications this process has for L2 learning.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Examine and question your assumptions regarding how children learn languages
- Describe the stages through which children develop and the relationship between cognitive and linguistic development
- Identify the various theories about children’s learning and consider how the key features of this process can be adapted to foster L2 learning.

Core reading


Recommended reading

- Elliot, A. J. 1981 Child Language C.U.P.

2.1 Introduction
This unit examines what is known about how children learn their first language and the stages, if they can be described as such, of their general cognitive development. It then looks at the development of theories concerned with how children learn in general and more specifically, how children learn their first language. As the focus of this module is the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, in dealing with both topics, we will give special attention to the aspects that can provide insights into these. The starting point for our work will be a reflection on the beliefs underlying our individual teaching theory.

2.2. Teachers’ Beliefs

Everything we do in the classroom is strongly influenced by our conceptions and preconceptions of thinking and learning, and of what affects learning. It also follows that our notions on how to teach will also be strongly affected by the view we adopt concerning the nature of language. As language teachers we need to be consciously aware of what our beliefs about learning, teaching, and language are, also because we need to be able to articulate them and discuss them with other professionals. Task 1 will help you to explore your beliefs and assumptions regarding how languages are learned.

**Task 1**

The aim of this task is to make you aware of your language learning theory.

In Appendix A you will find a questionnaire taken from page XVII of Lightbown and Spada “How languages are learnt”, third edition, 2006, O.U.P.

- Complete the questionnaire. As you work through the questions make brief notes to justify your choices noting down any evidence on which you are basing your decisions.
- If possible, discuss your responses with a colleague, and note any evidence/comments they offer.

We will return to examine the questionnaire results at the end of Unit 3.

We will now get down to analysing various descriptions of early language development and then the role played by the environment in this process.

2.3. The Observable Features of Early Language Development

Written by Nikki Dereboy
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
Research into child language while trying to answer the fundamental question: ‘How does the child learn language?’ has been strongly influenced by two standpoints, the first psycholinguistic, and the second functional or sociolinguistic.

Psycholinguistic research has concentrated on the lexical and structural development of what children say. Researchers in this field include McNeill (1966) and Brown R. (1973). McNeill focused on the acquisition of language structure, as do most researchers in this area. He identified two classes of words in two word utterances, pivotal and open, which he used to show how young children use rules of word order. According to the ‘pivot – open’ rule, an utterance consists of either an open word or a pivot word followed by an open word. Pivot words are few in number but will occur with great frequency, whereas open words occur infrequently but will be large in number. Thus a child whose pivot class contained the words there and Mummy, and whose open words included biscuit, chair, down, and birdie, would produce utterances like ‘there birdie’, Mummy biscuit’ or ‘down’ but not ‘chair down’ or ‘birdie there’. It may be from this kind of evidence that English speaking children develop a sense of subject in initial slot.

Brown R. (1973) in his investigation of the development of grammatical morphemes examined the development and use of 14 morphemes in a child’s first language development. He showed how in three children, the route through which they developed was common to all, although the rate of development varied.

Lightbown and Spada (1993: 58) list a slightly simplified version of the grammatical morphemes studied by Brown, in a list often referred to as ‘the order of acquisition’:

Present progressive –ing (Mommy running)
Plural –s (two books)
Irregular past forms (Baby went)
Possessive’s (daddy’s hat)
Copula (Annie is a nice girl)
Articles ‘the’ and ‘a’
Regular past –ed (She walked)
Third person singular simple present –s (She runs)
Auxiliary ‘be’ (He is coming)

There are of course many other aspects of language development that can be studied; morphemes cover only a small part of a child’s potential grammatical knowledge, but this study demonstrated that grammatical learning is systematic rather than haphazard. What studies such as these do not reveal is just how much children can understand at any point in their development, which, of course, is far more than they can produce.
Coming on now to the second area, the functional or sociolinguistic view of language acquisition has concentrated on the child’s development of meaning or rather what they do with their language. This work has highlighted the fact that children at this stage make their utterances maximally informative in the context in which they occur. Dore (1975) suggested that intonation may be an important means whereby the child produces a particular illocutionary force with just a single word utterance. Halliday (1975), a major proponent of this standpoint, hypothesised that learning the first language consists of recognising that there are certain basic functions of language and in developing a meaning potential in respect of each. He suggested a framework for a functional or sociolinguistic account of the early development of the mother tongue. Bruner (1975) concluded that it is through established routines of carrying on conversations about ‘here and now’ events that children are helped to recognise how talk relates to what is seen and touched and how variations in meaning are discriminated.

Both kinds of research have given us a large database of close observations and recordings of the early language development of many children. Much of this is grounded in naturalistic studies where the investigator systematically records the language produced by a child in the course of his early development. The observation of children in these studies varies in terms of regularity and consistency. (McGlothlin, 1997 and Halliday, 1975 are two specific examples of naturalistic studies).

The Halliday study is a fairly intensive study in which he made notes in a notebook of his son’s utterances by ‘sometimes taking part in the situation and sometimes staying outside it, hiding behind doors and furniture’. (Halliday 1975:11) Halliday also interpreted the content of the utterances in functional terms and noted any gestures or expressions that accompanied the utterance. For example ‘star’ + shaking the head (negation gesture) means ‘I can’t see the star’, whereas ‘star’ and pointing at the star means ‘look at the star.’

Halliday used the notes to develop a description of his son’s language, which was revisited and developed every six weeks, taking into account his son’s recent linguistic gains. The McGlothlin study, on the other hand, was far less systematic. When he heard the child use a new word he would ‘try to write it down on a sheet of paper’ (McGlothlin 1997:1). He did not note any accompanying gestures or expressions. McGlothlin’s interpretations of the notes lead to a rather speculative classification of children’s learning strategies, but none-the-less, interesting and worth a read.

These and other such naturalistic observations have provided evidence of a stable, identifiable sequence of stages, each of which can be associated with a normative age.
range. As shown by Singleton (1989) the four early stages most consistently mentioned in child language literature are:

- the ‘cooing’ stage, (when the child starts producing vocalizations with vowel like quality) this normally takes place between one and four months of age.
- the babbling stage, (when the child starts combining vowel-like and consonant-like sounds) this takes place between four and eight months.
- the one word or ‘holophrastic’ stage (when the child begins to employ single words meaningfully) this takes place between 12 and 18 months.
- the two word stage (when the child begins meaningfully to juxtapose words within the same tone group) between 18 and 24 months. As soon as two or more words are put together this is the beginnings of a grammatical system developing. An example of this is the ‘pivot and open’ rule described above.

(If you wish to read further on this topic, for a full discussion of the development of the child’s sound system see Singleton (1989) Chapter 2, and Elliot (1981) Chapter 4.)

The above stages describe what children say in terms of sounds, words and phrases. However, as mentioned above, Halliday interprets his list of sounds and words from a functional standpoint and thus considers the question of, ‘What can children do with their language?’ He suggests a set of functions, which could serve for the interpretation of the language of the child:

1. instrumental
2. regulatory
3. interactional
4. personal
5. heuristic
6 imaginative
and, later on,
7. informative.

**Task 2**

- Read the extract from Halliday 1975, “Learning how to mean” (see Appendix B). Then:
- Consider the following ten words taken from McLaughlin’s record of his child’s early speaking vocabulary when his child was 16 months old and try to analyse the list of child utterances according to Halliday’s categories.

  *Moo moo* (cassette tape): From one of his favourite tapes, that contains the sound of a cow. In requesting that tape he used that sound. That sound then came to refer to any cassette tape.
Toast:

Hot: (his first adjective);

Mimo my (my milk): his first possessive construction;

Ah choo (a sneeze);

Mouf (mouth);

Walk (the command, take me for a walk outside);

Okay;

Zisch (fish);

Zuzes (shoes);

You will probably have realised that without more information concerning the context of the utterance and any accompanying gestures it is very often difficult to interpret the functional meaning. For example ‘toast’ could be instrumental, i.e ‘I want toast.’ It could be regulatory, i.e. ‘Mummy pass me the toast.’ or it could be informative, i.e. ‘I had toast for dinner’. At this point:

• look again at the words from the list and make notes about how many possible ways each word could be interpreted in different situations.

As a final activity:

• What implications could Halliday’s breakdown have for teachers teaching YLs in a classroom? Start this task thinking in terms of activity choice, interaction patterns and syllabus design.

2.4. Children’s Language Learning Environments

Having read about two studies of children acquiring L1 in the home situation, let us now look in some detail at the language environment in which L1 learners are immersed.

Task 3

article describes the lexical development of a child from birth to about two years of age.

- Make notes on aspects of this child’s environment from the point of view of language learning opportunities. E.g. child can hear siblings talking.

Since a major component of children’s language environment and thus their knowledge about a particular language is the conversations directed at them by older members of the community, several researchers have focused on this as a communicative context, see, for example, Slobin (1975) and Ferguson (ed.) (1977.)

They observed that there are several specific features of speech that is addressed to young children. This way of speaking to children is often referred to as ‘motherese’ or ‘caretaker talk’. Elliot (1981: 51-52), in providing a clear overview of this research, notes the following characteristics of ‘motherese’:

a. Paralinguistic features
   (i) High pitch 
   (ii) Exaggerated intonation
b. Syntactic features
   (i) Shorter mean length of utterance  
   (ii) Fewer verb forms and modifiers 
   (iii) Fewer subordinate clauses/ embeddings per utterance 
   (iv) Shorter mean pre-verb length 
   (v) More verbless utterances 
   (vi) More content words, fewer function words 
c. Discourse features
   (i) More interrogatives and imperatives 
   (ii) Speech more fluent and intelligible 
   (iii) More repetitions whether complete, partial or semantic.

Recent research into motherese has highlighted the role that multimodality plays in modified talk, with younger children (pre-talk) being more exposed to synchronous action and talk than children who have begun to speak (Gogate et al, 2000). Nevertheless, it seems that children are subject to modified speech of some kind, no matter who is talking to them. This was demonstrated to me recently while my eight year old nephew, Joe, was visiting me. (Nikki). One day as he was holding a telephone conversation with his parents, his eighteen month old sister came on the line. His manner of speech immediately changed as he adopted several of the above characteristics, speaking more slowing with an exaggerated intonation, using shorter utterances.

Here is an example from Slattery and Willis (2001:10) of a mother talking to her child of 16 months.

**Task 4**

Written by Nikki Dereboy  
Revised by Rita Balbi  
May 2008
Read this transcript of a dialogue that takes place as a mother is dressing her child. Which of the syntactic and discourse features noted by Elliot above in parts b. and c. are illustrated in the transcript?

M: now – we’re nearly dressed --- okay now over your head – good boy – put in your other hand -- -- now shoes – where are your shoes?
Ch: sus ---
M: yes your shoes – where are they?
(both looking around for shoes)
M: oh there – look – your shoes – on the chair –
Ch: sus – sus-
M: yes shoes ----

Note: single dashes between words denote break between tone units; more than one dash means a slightly longer pause

In addition to conversations with carers and with other children during play, most children are exposed to a range of different sources of language. This input includes conversations continuing around them between adults, peers and siblings, TV programmes, CDs, DVDs, lyrics in music, radio programmes. Recent research, however, suggests that children younger than twenty-two months do not learn as many new words from watching children’s television as they do from one-to-one interaction with an adult (Kremar et al, 2007), highlighting the great importance of modified adult input to children’s language acquisition.

In terms of second language acquisition, Csapo-Sweet (1997) carried out research in Hungary to determine whether children can acquire new English words by viewing the American version of the children’s TV programme Sesame Street. A sample of school children aged between 9 and 16 learning English as a Second Language in Debrecen and Budapest viewed segments of Sesame Street. The children tested showed measurably significant gains in English vocabulary and word usage relative to control groups that did not watch the programmes. Research has also found that 8 – 12 year old children can acquire foreign language from watching subtitled television, although they tend to learn more when the foreign language is in the sound track (d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel, 1999).

Task 5

Research into L1 acquisition reveals that children gain thousands of hours of exposure before they start talking, and that this exposure is vital.

What implications does this have for classroom and L2 learning? Can you think of
In the next section we will be looking at various explanations of how language is learned, which moves us into the field of children’s cognitive development.

2.5 Cognitive Development and Language Learning.

Though there is agreement on the observable features of early language development and the environment surrounding it, there is wide disagreement regarding the explanation of how language is learned and to what extent the environment influences this process. Many, often conflicting, theories have been suggested, all of which are influenced by the proponents’ views concerning the nature of young children’s cognitive development and the nature of language. Lightbrown and Spada (chapter 1) provide a clear overview of three central theoretical positions that have been offered as explanations of how language is learned. They are the **behaviourist**, the **innatist** and the **interactionist** views of language acquisition. If you have not already done so already we recommend that you read this chapter before you proceed with this unit, which includes only fairly brief summaries of each of these positions.

So far in your reading, you will have come across the word **cognitive** on a number of occasions. Before you continue, read Mussen’s definition below and make sure you know what you mean by this term.

> Cognition refers to the process involved in: (1) perception – the detection, organization, and interpretation of information from both the outside world and the internal environment, (2) memory – the storage and retrieval of the perceived information, (3) reasoning – the use of knowledge to make inferences and draw conclusions, (4) reflection – the evaluation of the quality of ideas and solutions, and (5) insight – the recognition of the new relationships between two or more segments of knowledge. (Mussen et al, 197 1990: 233 – 234)

As teachers of young learners we need to be aware of how children’s cognitive development could influence children’s learning in the classroom.

2.5.1 Behaviourism

One of the first theories about how children learn was developed by Thorndike and Skinner (cited in MacDonald 1964). Much of their work and theory, however, was influenced by experiments that were carried out by Pavlov, a Russian physiologist and psychologist. Pavlov was the first investigator to conduct systematic studies of conditioned responses. He attempted to explain the acquisition of any new behaviour as a process of operant conditioning by which new behaviours (such as a rat pushing...
a bar) would be learned, depending on the extent to which they were reinforced in some way by the environment (such as receiving food).

Thorndike and Skinner applied Pavlov’s findings on animal learning to the teaching of children. They believed that children should be taught according to the principles of operant conditioning, which is the form of learning theory they pioneered. The theory has two key concepts – the operant and reinforcement. An operant is an action by the organism – an utterance by the child – that achieves a specific outcome that serves to reinforce the operant. If the outcome is favourable to the organism, the probability increases that the operant will occur again and the action is said to be reinforced. It is positively reinforced if followed by a pleasant stimulus. Thorndike and Skinner described their theory as the ‘Stimulus-Response’ Theory. Thorndike’s view of learning was that it was about developing connections and that those connections were a means whereby behaviour could be modified. His work suggested two educational principles:

- Put together what should go together and keep apart what should not go together.
- Reward desirable connections and make undesirable connections produce discomfort. (MacDonald, 1964: 8)

This led Skinner to criticize teachers for not employing effective schedules of reinforcement in the classroom. He argued that education could be improved considerably by the adoption of four simple procedures. These are summarised here from the account written by Williams and Burden (1997:9):

- teachers should make clear what is to be taught;
- tasks should be broken down into small, sequential steps;
- students should be encouraged to work at their own pace by means of individualized learning programmes;
- learning should be ‘programmed’ by incorporating the above procedures and providing immediate positive reinforcement based as nearly as possible on 100 per cent success.

Thus whether reading, writing or arithmetic is being considered by behaviourists, development is viewed as the mastery of conditioned reflexes. This notion was elaborated by James (1958) who reduced the learning process to habit formation and identified the learning process with development. As James (1958:38), expressed it,

“Education, in short, cannot be better described than by calling it the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies of behaviour.”
When this theory is applied to language learning, language is seen as behaviour to be taught. It is considered to be an accumulation of facts and skills introduced to the learner in a controlled manner by the teacher.

### 2.5.2 The Behaviourist Position Applied to Language Learning

The acquisition of a language may not initially appear to be very different from the other things that children learn. It may seem unremarkable that an English child who hears countless hours of language spoken to and around him or her will eventually begin to produce the same sounds, words, and grammatical structures. As shown above, a lot of the language children are exposed to in the form of ‘motherese’ is very repetitive, slow and grammatically uncomplicated. Parents also provide considerable encouragement for their children to speak, as can be seen in the smiles and hugs that follow the first utterance of “mamma” or “dada”. Children learn to do many things: drink from cups, get dressed, open and close doors, and even operate televisions and video players, apparently from observing and imitating the actions they see other people performing and by being reinforced by the satisfaction of the consequences of their actions. Why should language acquisition be any different?

This is essentially what behaviourists such as Thorndike, Skinner and James proposed. In essence, Skinner’s analysis of verbal behaviour is an attempt to show how language is shaped by the environment in the same way that a rat’s lever pushing or a pigeon’s key pecking can be controlled by providing and withholding food. By giving reinforcement for the sounds, words, and sentences the child produces that approximate the adult form of the language, and by withholding such reinforcement when an utterance is somehow deviant, the child’s verbal behaviour is gradually shaped over time to approximate the language of the community.

The behaviourist explanations for language acquisition offer a reasonable way of understanding how children learn some of the regular and routine aspects of language. However, they cannot explain the fact that all normal children show impressive knowledge of the syntactic structure of language despite considerable variation in their exposure to language. We also need to consider original utterances. If we simply repeated what we were exposed to, then how do we account for original phrases like ‘Look – the smoke is boiling out the chimneys!’ (three year old Willis grandchild on a winter day) and other such creative language?

### Task 6

#### Part 1

Can you think of any language classroom activities that are based on behaviourist principles? You may like to take a quick look through a unit in a typical course book.
or Teacher’s book and see how many activities are behaviourist in approach.

**Part 2**
What creative phrases have you heard children say in their first or second language? Start making a list.

### 2.5.3 The Innatist Position

Chomsky rejected as inadequate the behaviourist theories of learning. In 1959, he wrote a highly critical review of Skinner’s work. He attacked Skinner’s and other learning theories by focusing on the syntactic structure of language and the fact that all normal children show impressive knowledge of this structure despite considerable variation in their exposure to language. (N.B. when Chomsky refers to a ‘knowledge’ of language he is not talking about conscious awareness of the rules but rather the ability to form and use the rules). He also argued that the examples of language that children hear are inadequate for them to figure out the underlying generative rules on their own. Children hear only a relatively small subset of sentences, but also hear many false starts, slips of the tongue, interruptions; many of the sentences they hear are not well formed or are simplified. This input is also combined with a lot of background noise such as traffic, television, surrounding conversations. Chomsky referred to these characteristics of the input as the ‘poverty of the stimulus’, implying that the language heard by a child is not sufficiently clear, accurate or structured for a child to be able to deduce its underlying generative rules.

Chomsky perceived language as a mental faculty granted to all humans by their biology and therefore worked to develop universal laws called generative grammar that would both describe and explain all language.

He proposed, as a theoretical construct, a language acquisition device (LAD), which accepts, as input, the primary linguistic data and has, as output, a grammar of the language from which the data have been drawn.

Chomsky believed that since language cannot be acquired by environmental instruction then the syntactic patterns are innate. Children will obviously not acquire language without exposure to it, but minimal and haphazard exposure is all that is required to trigger its acquisition.

One example of this is English-speaking children’s acquisition of the past tense rule. Early on, (see the list of morphemes in 2.2 above) children tend to learn irregular past tense verbs forms, e.g. *went, bought* as lexical items. Later, when they acquire the rule that to refer to the past, you use an –*ed* ending, they switch for a time to saying *goed* or *buyed*. They may never have heard this in their input, but it happens all the
same. Sometimes both forms co-exist for a while before the incorrect form slowly falls into disuse.

For participants wanting to delve a little deeper into Chomsky’s ideas, see Lightbown and Spada (1997:15-22), or Pinker (1994).

Chomsky was interested in universals and so did not pursue such aspects as differences in rate of acquisition or smoothness of development that occur in and are probably dependant on features of the external environment. In fact he played down the effects of environment on language learning. Where he did comment on environment it was to describe the linguistic input as degenerate. This contradicts studies of mother’s speech to children, which indicate that far from being complex and ungrammatical, language addressed to young children is usually simple, and remarkably free from hesitation and deviation from grammaticality. His views do not account either for the fact that from a very early age children appear to be able to communicate very fluently. They are able to produce utterances that are not only well formed according to a linguist’s standards, but also appropriate to the social context in which the speakers find themselves. They thus appear to have acquired communicative competence appropriate to their social circumstances. Chomsky’s theories do not account for this.

2.5.4 Cognitive Psychology and Constructivist Theories

Linguists such as Chomsky were not alone in their criticism of Behaviourism. (Though probably not directly influencing each other, Piaget came to similar conclusions as Chomsky regarding the minimal effect of the environment on a child’s development.) Because behaviourism concentrates solely on observable behaviour, rather than on the way the human mind thinks and learns, it was also criticized for avoiding any consideration of the cognitive or mental processes that learners bring to the task of learning. Behaviourist theory, then, neglected higher processes – thought, language, and volitional behaviour.

Several psychologists, specifically Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky developed a new approach to psychology that became known as Cognitive Psychology. Cognitive psychology is concerned with the way the human mind thinks and learns. Constructivists thus study the mental processes underlying behaviours. They reject, in principle, the possibility of accounting for complex processes in terms of simple ones, which is a basic tenet of behaviourism. The concept of cognitive structure is central to these theories. Cognitive structures are patterns of physical or mental action that underlie specific acts of intelligence.

A major theme in the theoretical framework of Cognitive Psychology is that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon
their current or past knowledge. The emphasis of Cognitivists’ work is focused on the constructive nature of the learning process. This is in direct contrast to the behaviourist theory, which, as shown above sees learning as the accumulation of facts or the development of skills. The core of constructivism is that children are involved right from birth in constructing personal meaning. They develop their own understanding of the world based on their personal experiences. The learner is brought into central focus in this learning theory (as opposed to the teacher being the centre of focus as in behaviourist theories).

2.5.5 Piaget – The Child as a Lone Scientist

Jean Piaget was the dominant figure in cognitive psychology for many years. The sheer quantity of Piaget’s work is impressive. Luckily M. Donaldson (1987) provides a very brief and clear account of the main features of Piaget’s theory in an appendix to her book *Children’s Minds*. For participants who wish to read some of Piaget’s work, *The origins of intelligence in Children* (1966) and *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology* (1972) provide good starting points.

Piaget was primarily interested in the way people came to know things as they developed from infancy to adulthood. Piaget collected his data over a period of six decades by conducting a programme of naturalistic research on children and observing their behaviour. His research has profoundly affected our understanding of child development.

Piaget argued that cognitive structures change through the process of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation involves the interpretation of events in terms of existing cognitive structures. Whereas accommodation refers to changing cognitive structure to make sense of the environment, cognitive development consists of a constant effort to adapt to the environment in terms of assimilation and accommodation.

At the heart of Piaget’s theory is the conviction that learners’ cognitive structures develop in an age related sequence of stages. Williams and Burden (1997:21-22) summarise these stages as follows:

“For the young infant, the most important way of exploring the environment is considered by Piaget to be through the basic senses. This he calls the sensory-motor stage of learning. Gradually through the development of organized actions and thoughts, the child comes to perceive and deal with the world in more sophisticated ways. The next stage is the intuitive or pre-operational stage, which is usually considered to last between the ages of two and seven. This is when the child’s thoughts become more flexible and when memory and imagination begin to play a part. Piaget uses the term operation to refer to internalised actions, i.e. the way in
which actions become part of children’s imaginations. In these early years such operations are beginning to take place, but they are as yet quite crude and inflexible. After about the age of seven, the child is seen as entering the concrete-operational stage when the realization begins to dawn that operations can be reversed, e.g. that ice that melts into water can be frozen again into ice. This enables children to go beyond the information given but is still dependant upon concrete examples. Finally there is a move to formal operational thinking when abstract reasoning becomes increasingly possible. Piaget considered that this should not happen before the adolescent years and will tend to vary across subject areas.

Although Piaget wrote very little about the educational implications of his theory, the idea that children pass through stages of development, and the assertion that they cannot learn how to function at higher levels before they have passed through the lower ones, was taken up and formed the basis for a new theory of learning readiness. This theory assumes that development is always a prerequisite for learning and that if a child’s mental functions have not matured enough to the extent of being capable of learning a particular subject then no instruction will prove useful. Premature instruction, i.e. the teaching of a subject before the child is ready for it, is to be avoided. All effort is concentrated on finding the lower threshold of learning ability, the age at which a particular kind of learning becomes possible.

This approach is based on the premise that learning trails behind development and therefore that development outruns learning. It precludes the notion that learning may play a role in the course of development or maturation of those functions activated in the course of learning.

Piaget described children in the early stages of development as being egocentric and unable to decentre. By this he means that children in this stage of development are unable to make a distinction between themselves and the rest of the world, they do not realize that their views and needs are different from those of others. A decrease in egocentrism amounts to an increase in the ability to decentre – that is to move freely from one point of view to another.

Piaget views language as a system of symbols for representing the world. He sees this as distinct from actions and operations that form the process of reasoning.

Several studies, specifically those carried out by Vygotsky in Russia and by Donaldson and her team in Britain, have produced evidence that leads to the rejection and re-interpretation of certain features of Piaget’s theory of intellectual development. These studies focussed on the way in which language, communication and instruction affect the development of knowledge and learning. These studies led them to abandon the belief in pronounced childhood egocentrism and highlight the importance of social interaction in learning. In fact, Vygotsky and more recently,
Donaldson, put language and communication at the core of intellectual and personal development.

2.5.6 Vygotsky – The child making sense within a social context

Vygotsky worked in Russia between 1924 and 1934 when he died of tuberculosis. His work was not translated in the west until the 1960s. The most influential of his work are ‘Thought and Language’ (1962) and ‘Mind in Society’ (1978).

As noted by Wood, (1988) Vygotsky shared with Piaget a similar conception of the relations between thought and action. Also like Piaget he argued that the foundations of mental processes lie in action-in-the-world. However, Vygotsky assigned a much greater significance to the social environment than Piaget. He observed that children who were unable to complete or perform a task when left to their own devices often succeeded when they were helped by an adult. He argued that the capacity to learn through instruction is itself a fundamental feature of human intelligence.

‘Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers.’ (Vygotsky 1978)

Social interaction is thus assigned a central role in facilitating learning. For Vygotsky, a child’s potential for learning is revealed and is indeed often realised in interactions with more knowledgeable others. These ‘more knowledgeable others’ could be anyone - mother father, siblings, teacher, and so on. In the language classroom as in other subject areas his theory provides a strong argument for mixing ability and not streaming. It also argues for learning activities that allow social interaction with peers (with teacher support), for example children in groups writing their own version of a story or book that has been read to them or one that they have read.

One of Vygotsky’s main contributions to our understanding of learning is his theory of ‘The Zone of Proximal Development’ or ZPD. This refers to

‘the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving activities with more capable peers.’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 86).

This goes along with the notion that what a child can do with assistance today he will be able to do by himself tomorrow. For Vygotsky, the foundation of learning and development is co-operatively achieved success, and the basis of that success is language and communication. There is no single ZPD for individuals because the
zone will vary depending on culture, society, and experience. Vygotsky claimed that the larger the zone, the better students will learn in school.

**Task 7**

- Read Van Der Stuyf, 2002, “Scaffolding as a Teaching Strategy” (Appendix C) and think of any contexts in an EFL classroom in which the notion of scaffolding would apply and benefit the learning process. How many can you think of?

**Task 8**

- Read the two texts reported in Appendices D and E and compare Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis. What have the two approaches in common? What makes them different? Would you consider “Teacher Talk” as intended by Krashen as a form of scaffolding?

In doing Task 8 you may have noted that Vygotsky’s theory is about learning in general while Krashen’s model refers to second language learning. Both theories emphasise the fact that learning means change and development from a state of “ignorance” to a state of knowledge and competence; this takes place in stages and in the presence of certain conditions, as, for example, opportunities for the learners to be exposed to something new but manageable, use of previous knowledge as a basis for internalising the input received and teacher’s supporting strategies. These three factors are shaped in different ways in the two cases. The former implies various conscious modalities while the latter expects learners to make sense and use of the input unconsciously. Both consider learning as the product of a focussed relationship between teacher and learner.

Another paper that could give you useful insights about how scaffolding contributes to learning is “Effective Talk in the Primary Classroom”. This paper reports the outcome of a research project conducted in three primary schools in the United Kingdom. We would argue that although based on the observation of lessons other than FLs, most of its key findings and its things to try in the classroom based on the findings could apply to the language classroom. A strong point of this study is that it also reads very pleasantly!

The two broad views of children’s cognitive development described above, namely the child as a ‘social being’ or the child as a ‘lone scientist’, have been concisely captured by Bruner and Haste (1987:1) in the excerpt below.
Task 9

As you read the following quote from Bruner, J. and Haste, H. Eds. (1987:1) consider the implications for teaching English as a foreign language. Consider your own context. What opportunities are there in the classroom situation for the children to function as social beings within a shared social context?

*A quiet revolution has taken place in developmental psychology in the last decade. It is not only that we have begun to think of the child as a social being – one who plays and talks with others, learns through social interactions with parents and teachers – but because we have come once more to appreciate that through such social life, the child acquires a framework for interpreting experience, and learns how to negotiate meaning in a manner congruent with the requirements of the culture. ‘Making sense’ is a social process; it is an activity that is always situated within the cultural and historical context. Before that, we had fallen into the habit of thinking of the child as ‘active scientist’, constructing hypotheses about the world, reflecting upon experience, interacting with the physical environment and formulating increasingly complex structures of thought. But this active, constructing child had been conceived as a rather isolated being, working alone at her problem-solving. Increasingly we see now that, given an appropriate, shared social context the child seems more competent as an intelligent social operator than she is a ‘lone scientist’ coping with a world of unknowns. Bruner and Haste (1987:1)*

As an extension of the topics covered in this unit, see Johnston, 2005. It’s a short article but worth reading.

2.6 Summary and discussion

We started this unit by looking at our beliefs regarding language learning. We then examined a number of different ways in which people have tried to answer the question: How do children learn languages? This covered the two main observable features of language; what children say and what they do with language. We then looked at various cognitive theories that people have used to try to explain how learning occurs. This research has all focussed on the child, whether the child is seen as an active or passive participant in the learning process, and what the child can produce and do with language.

From an early age, children appear to communicate very fluently. They are not just absorbing rules of grammar and collocation, they are also learning how to use language appropriately in a social context. This is what Halliday refers to as ‘communicative competence’. As we saw earlier, Halliday talks about the functions
of language, where he interprets ‘function’, ‘not just as the use of language but as a fundamental property of language itself, and particularly of the semantic system. ’Halliday (1985: 17).

During their first two stages, the ‘cooing’ and ‘babbling’ stages, (which normally last up to about nine months) children produce sounds, though these sounds are meaningless to adult listeners. It is when children are producing one word at a time, their holophrastic stage that these utterances begin to convey meaning. In fact, they can convey as much meaning to the adult listener as a complete sentence would have done. It is argued that, by the time children begin to learn the lexical content of the language around them they already have a fairly sound idea of how language is used for communicative purposes. The question then becomes, how do we explain the success with which very young children communicate? Halliday suggests that the answer lies in the listener having a good idea of what the child is going to say. This he believes is the most important phenomenon in human communication. We make predictions based on the context of the situation in which the interaction takes place.

The ability to convey meaning through such minimal output is therefore dependant on the ability of the more mature listener to interpret not only the utterance but also the context and the systematic relationship between the context and the utterance. This reflects Vygotsky’s theory of language being social and communicative in both origin and intent. He described how very small children who are weak and cannot sustain themselves, have many of the things they need or want supplied by other more mature members of the community. Gestures and speech serve this role giving young children a way of influencing the course of their immediate future in a way that they could not do alone. Exchanging roles during verbal exchanges appears to be a much later development in children. Halliday (1975) treats the development of dialogue as a major achievement of the period between 16 and 18 months. He sees this period as a transitional stage before the use of adult language. Evidence shows that children and adults learning L2 naturally proceed through roughly the same stages and manage to communicate what they want with very few words. But one major difference between L1 and L2 learning is that L2 learners are not learning how to mean – they already know what meanings are available to language users. However, they still have to learn a new system for expressing those meanings.

In the next unit we will explore other similarities and differences between L1 and L2 learning and focus on second language learning in schools. The children’s language learning environment thus becomes the classroom environment. The teacher has a pivotal role in the classroom.

2.6 Looking ahead
It is now time to reconsider the contents covered in this unit and try to identify the things you wish to remember because they support and facilitate learning. What about making a list of factors contributing to learning and keep it as reference for future units?

In your opinion and according to your experience how can teachers contribute to develop those factors and foster learning?

At this point you might like to compare your views with those in Williams and Burden (1997), Chapter 3.

Are there any areas from this unit that you would like to explore further? Would you consider any of the topics covered in this unit as worthwhile for your assignment?

References:

• MacDonald, F. J. 1964. ‘The influence of learning theories on education’. *Theories of Learning and Instruction*, NSSE Yearbook, Chicago: NSSE.
• Slattery, M. and Willis, J. 2001 ‘English For Primary Teachers: a handbook of activities and classroom language’ OUP.


Wood, D. 1988. How Children Think and Learn Blackwell Publisher

Appendix A

Questionnaire from Lightbown and Spada. 2006. Third edition How languages are learnt, OUP. Pages XVII and XVIII

See your module blackboard

Appendix B


Appendix C

Van Der Stuyf, 2002, “Scaffolding as a Teaching Strategy”

See your module blackboard

Appendix D


http://www.myread.org/scaffolding.htm

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Appendix E


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TYL Unit 2

Children as Language Learners

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Teachers’ Beliefs

2.3 The Observable Features of Early Language Development

2.4 Children’s Language Learning Environments

2.5 Cognitive Development and Language Learning
   2.5.1 Behaviourism
   2.5.2 The Behaviourist Position Applied to Language Learning
   2.5.3 The Innatist Position
   2.5.4 Cognitive Psychology and Constructivist Theories
   2.5.5 Piaget – The Child as a Lone Scientist
   2.5.6 Vygotsky – The child making sense within a social context

2.6 Summary and Discussion

2.7 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Goals

This unit aims to focus on how children acquire their first language and the implications this process has for L2 learning.

By the end of this Unit you should be able to:

- Examine and question your assumptions regarding how children learn languages
- Describe the stages through which children develop and the relationship between cognitive and linguistic development
- Identify the various theories about children’s learning and consider how the key features of this process can be adapted to foster L2 learning.

Core reading


Recommended reading

- Elliot, A. J. 1981 Child Language C.U.P.

2.1 Introduction
This unit examines what is known about how children learn their first language and the stages, if they can be described as such, of their general cognitive development. It then looks at the development of theories concerned with how children learn in general and more specifically, how children learn their first language. As the focus of this module is the teaching of English as a second or foreign language, in dealing with both topics, we will give special attention to the aspects that can provide insights into these. The starting point for our work will be a reflection on the beliefs underlying our individual teaching theory.

2.2. Teachers’ Beliefs

Everything we do in the classroom is strongly influenced by our conceptions and preconceptions of thinking and learning, and of what affects learning. It also follows that our notions on how to teach will also be strongly affected by the view we adopt concerning the nature of language. As language teachers we need to be consciously aware of what our beliefs about learning, teaching, and language are, also because we need to be able to articulate them and discuss them with other professionals. Task 1 will help you to explore your beliefs and assumptions regarding how languages are learned.

Task 1

The aim of this task is to make you aware of your language learning theory.

In Appendix A you will find a questionnaire taken from page XVII of Lightbown and Spada “How languages are learnt”, third edition, 2006, O.U.P.

- Complete the questionnaire. As you work through the questions make brief notes to justify your choices noting down any evidence on which you are basing your decisions.
- If possible, discuss your responses with a colleague, and note any evidence/comments they offer.

We will return to examine the questionnaire results at the end of Unit 3.

We will now get down to analysing various descriptions of early language development and then the role played by the environment in this process.

2.3. The Observable Features of Early Language Development
Research into child language while trying to answer the fundamental question: ‘How does the child learn language?’ has been strongly influenced by two standpoints, the first psycholinguistic, and the second functional or sociolinguistic.

Psycholinguistic research has concentrated on the lexical and structural development of what children say. Researchers in this field include McNeill (1966) and Brown R. (1973). McNeill focused on the acquisition of language structure, as do most researchers in this area. He identified two classes of words in two word utterances, pivotal and open, which he used to show how young children use rules of word order. According to the ‘pivot – open’ rule, an utterance consists of either an open word or a pivot word followed by an open word. Pivot words are few in number but will occur with great frequency, whereas open words occur infrequently but will be large in number. Thus a child whose pivot class contained the words there and Mummy, and whose open words included biscuit, chair, down, and birdie, would produce utterances like ‘there birdie’, Mummy biscuit’ or ‘down’ but not ‘chair down’ or ‘birdie there’. It may be from this kind of evidence that English speaking children develop a sense of subject in initial slot.

Brown R. (1973) in his investigation of the development of grammatical morphemes examined the development and use of 14 morphemes in a child’s first language development. He showed how in three children, the route through which they developed was common to all, although the rate of development varied.

Lightbown and Spada (1993: 58) list a slightly simplified version of the grammatical morphemes studied by Brown, in a list often referred to as ‘the order of acquisition’:

Present progressive –ing (Mommy running)  
Plural –s (two books)  
Irregular past forms (Baby went)  
Possessive’s (daddy’s hat)  
Copula (Annie is a nice girl)  
Articles ‘the’ and ‘a’  
Regular past –ed (She walked)  
Third person singular simple present –s (She runs)  
Auxiliary ‘be’ (He is coming)

There are of course many other aspects of language development that can be studied; morphemes cover only a small part of a child’s potential grammatical knowledge, but this study demonstrated that grammatical learning is systematic rather than haphazard. What studies such as these do not reveal is just how much children can understand at any point in their development, which, of course, is far more than they can produce.
Coming on now to the second area, the functional or sociolinguistic view of language acquisition has concentrated on the child’s development of meaning or rather what they do with their language. This work has highlighted the fact that children at this stage make their utterances maximally informative in the context in which they occur. Dore (1975) suggested that intonation may be an important means whereby the child produces a particular illocutionary force with just a single word utterance. Halliday (1975), a major proponent of this standpoint, hypothesised that learning the first language consists of recognising that there are certain basic functions of language and in developing a meaning potential in respect of each. He suggested a framework for a functional or sociolinguistic account of the early development of the mother tongue. Bruner (1975) concluded that it is through established routines of carrying on conversations about ‘here and now’ events that children are helped to recognise how talk relates to what is seen and touched and how variations in meaning are discriminated.

Both kinds of research have given us a large database of close observations and recordings of the early language development of many children. Much of this is grounded in naturalistic studies where the investigator systematically records the language produced by a child in the course of his early development. The observation of children in these studies varies in terms of regularity and consistency. (McGlothlin, 1997 and Halliday, 1975 are two specific examples of naturalistic studies).

The Halliday study is a fairly intensive study in which he made notes in a notebook of his son’s utterances by ‘sometimes taking part in the situation and sometimes staying outside it, hiding behind doors and furniture’. (Halliday 1975:11) Halliday also interpreted the content of the utterances in functional terms and noted any gestures or expressions that accompanied the utterance. For example ‘star’ + shaking the head (negation gesture) means ‘I can’t see the star’, whereas ‘star’ and pointing at the star means ‘look at the star.’

Halliday used the notes to develop a description of his son’s language, which was revisited and developed every six weeks, taking into account his son’s recent linguistic gains. The McGlothlin study, on the other hand, was far less systematic. When he heard the child use a new word he would ‘try to write it down on a sheet of paper’ (McGlothlin 1997:1). He did not note any accompanying gestures or expressions. McGlothlin’s interpretations of the notes lead to a rather speculative classification of children’s learning strategies, but none-the-less, interesting and worth a read.

These and other such naturalistic observations have provided evidence of a stable, identifiable sequence of stages, each of which can be associated with a normative age
range. As shown by Singleton (1989) the four early stages most consistently mentioned in child language literature are:

- the ‘cooing’ stage, (when the child starts producing vocalizations with vowel like quality) this normally takes place between one and four months of age.
- the babbling stage, (when the child starts combining vowel-like and consonant-like sounds) this takes place between four and eight months.
- the one word or ‘holophrastic’ stage (when the child begins to employ single words meaningfully) this takes place between 12 and 18 months.
- the two word stage (when the child begins meaningfully to juxtapose words within the same tone group) between 18 and 24 months. As soon as two or more words are put together this is the beginnings of a grammatical system developing. An example of this is the ‘pivot and open’ rule described above.

(If you wish to read further on this topic, for a full discussion of the development of the child’s sound system see Singleton (1989) Chapter 2, and Elliot (1981) Chapter 4.)

The above stages describe what children say in terms of sounds, words and phrases. However, as mentioned above, Halliday interprets his list of sounds and words from a functional standpoint and thus considers the question of, ‘What can children do with their language?’ He suggests a set of functions, which could serve for the interpretation of the language of the child:
1. instrumental
2. regulatory
3. interactional
4. personal
5. heuristic
6 imaginative and, later on,
7. informative.

**Task 2**

- Read the extract from Halliday 1975, “Learning how to mean” (see Appendix B). Then:
- Consider the following ten words taken from McLaughlin’s record of his child’s early speaking vocabulary when his child was 16 months old and try to analyse the list of child utterances according to Halliday’s categories.

  *Moo moo* (cassette tape): From one of his favourite tapes, that contains the sound of a cow. In requesting that tape he used that sound. That sound then came to refer to any cassette tape.
Toasting Young Learners Unit 2

Toast:

Hot: (his first adjective);

Mimo my (my milk): his first possessive construction;

Ah choo (a sneeze);

Mouf (mouth);

Walk (the command, take me for a walk outside);

Okay;

Zisch (fish);

Zuzes (shoes);

You will probably have realised that without more information concerning the context of the utterance and any accompanying gestures it is very often difficult to interpret the functional meaning. For example ‘toast’ could be instrumental, i.e. ‘I want toast.’ It could be regulatory, i.e. ‘Mummy pass me the toast.’ or it could be informative, i.e. ‘I had toast for dinner.’ At this point:

- look again at the words from the list and make notes about how many possible ways each word could be interpreted in different situations.

As a final activity:

- What implications could Halliday’s breakdown have for teachers teaching YLs in a classroom? Start this task thinking in terms of activity choice, interaction patterns and syllabus design.

2.4. Children’s Language Learning Environments

Having read about two studies of children acquiring L1 in the home situation, let us now look in some detail at the language environment in which L1 learners are immersed.

Task 3

article describes the lexical development of a child from birth to about two years of age.

- Make notes on aspects of this child’s environment from the point of view of language learning opportunities. E.g. child can hear siblings talking.

Since a major component of children’s language environment and thus their knowledge about a particular language is the conversations directed at them by older members of the community, several researchers have focused on this as a communicative context, see, for example, Slobin (1975) and Ferguson (ed.) (1977.)

They observed that there are several specific features of speech that is addressed to young children. This way of speaking to children is often referred to as ‘motherese’ or ‘caretaker talk’. Elliot (1981: 51-52), in providing a clear overview of this research, notes the following characteristics of ‘motherese’:

a. Paralinguistic features
   (i) High pitch
   (ii) Exaggerated intonation
b. Syntactic features
   (i) Shorter mean length of utterance
   (ii) Fewer verb forms and modifiers
   (iii) Fewer subordinate clauses/ embeddings per utterance
   (iv) Shorter mean pre-verb length
   (v) More verbless utterances
   (vi) More content words, fewer function words
c. Discourse features
   (i) More interrogatives and imperatives
   (ii) Speech more fluent and intelligible
   (iii) More repetitions whether complete, partial or semantic.

Recent research into motherese has highlighted the role that multimodality plays in modified talk, with younger children (pre-talk) being more exposed to synchronous action and talk than children who have begun to speak (Gogate et al, 2000). Nevertheless, it seems that children are subject to modified speech of some kind, no matter who is talking to them. This was demonstrated to me recently while my eight year old nephew, Joe, was visiting me. (Nikki). One day as he was holding a telephone conversation with his parents, his eighteen month old sister came on the line. His manner of speech immediately changed as he adopted several of the above characteristics, speaking more slowing with an exaggerated intonation, using shorter utterances.

Here is an example from Slattery and Willis (2001:10) of a mother talking to her child of 16 months.

Task 4

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Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
• Read this transcript of a dialogue that takes place as a mother is dressing her child. Which of the syntactic and discourse features noted by Elliot above in parts b. and c. are illustrated in the transcript?

M:        now – we’re nearly dressed --- okay now over your head – good boy – put in your other hand -- -- now shoes – where are your shoes?
Ch:      sus ---
M:       yes your shoes – where are they?
(both looking around for shoes)
M:       oh there – look – your shoes – on the chair –
Ch:      sus – sus-
M:       yes shoes ----

Note: single dashes between words denote break between tone units; more than one dash means a slightly longer pause

In addition to conversations with carers and with other children during play, most children are exposed to a range of different sources of language. This input includes conversations continuing around them between adults, peers and siblings, TV programmes, CDs, DVDs, lyrics in music, radio programmes. Recent research, however, suggests that children younger than twenty-two months do not learn as many new words from watching children’s television as they do from one-to-one interaction with an adult (Krcmar et al, 2007), highlighting the great importance of modified adult input to children’s language acquisition.

In terms of second language acquisition, Csapo-Sweet (1997) carried out research in Hungary to determine whether children can acquire new English words by viewing the American version of the children’s TV programme Sesame Street. A sample of school children aged between 9 and 16 learning English as a Second Language in Debrecen and Budapest viewed segments of Sesame Street. The children tested showed measurably significant gains in English vocabulary and word usage relative to control groups that did not watch the programmes. Research has also found that 8 – 12 year old children can acquire foreign language from watching subtitled television, although they tend to learn more when the foreign language is in the sound track (d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel, 1999).

Task 5

Research into L1 acquisition reveals that children gain thousands of hours of exposure before they start talking, and that this exposure is vital.

What implications does this have for classroom and L2 learning? Can you think of
In the next section we will be looking at various explanations of how language is learned, which moves us into the field of children’s cognitive development.

2.5 Cognitive Development and Language Learning.

Though there is agreement on the observable features of early language development and the environment surrounding it, there is wide disagreement regarding the explanation of how language is learned and to what extent the environment influences this process. Many, often conflicting, theories have been suggested, all of which are influenced by the proponents’ views concerning the nature of young children’s cognitive development and the nature of language. Lightbrown and Spada (chapter 1) provide a clear overview of three central theoretical positions that have been offered as explanations of how language is learned. They are the behaviourist, the innatist and the interactionist views of language acquisition. If you have not already done so already we recommend that you read this chapter before you proceed with this unit, which includes only fairly brief summaries of each of these positions.

So far in your reading, you will have come across the word cognitive on a number of occasions. Before you continue, read Mussen’s definition below and make sure you know what you mean by this term.

Cognition refers to the process involved in: (1) perception – the detection, organization, and interpretation of information from both the outside world and the internal environment, (2) memory – the storage and retrieval of the perceived information, (3) reasoning – the use of knowledge to make inferences and draw conclusions, (4) reflection – the evaluation of the quality of ideas and solutions, and (5) insight – the recognition of the new relationships between two or more segments of knowledge. (Mussen et al, 1979 1990: 233 – 234)

As teachers of young learners we need to be aware of how children’s cognitive development could influence children’s learning in the classroom.

2.5.1 Behaviourism

One of the first theories about how children learn was developed by Thorndike and Skinner (cited in MacDonald 1964). Much of their work and theory, however, was influenced by experiments that were carried out by Pavlov, a Russian physiologist and psychologist. Pavlov was the first investigator to conduct systematic studies of conditioned responses. He attempted to explain the acquisition of any new behaviour as a process of operant conditioning by which new behaviours (such as a rat pushing
a bar) would be learned, depending on the extent to which they were reinforced in some way by the environment (such as receiving food).

Thorndike and Skinner applied Pavlov’s findings on animal learning to the teaching of children. They believed that children should be taught according to the principles of operant conditioning, which is the form of learning theory they pioneered. The theory has two key concepts – the operant and reinforcement. An operant is an action by the organism – an utterance by the child – that achieves a specific outcome that serves to reinforce the operant. If the outcome is favourable to the organism, the probability increases that the operant will occur again and the action is said to be reinforced. It is positively reinforced if followed by a pleasant stimulus. Thorndike and Skinner described their theory as the ‘Stimulus-Response’ Theory. Thorndike’s view of learning was that it was about developing connections and that those connections were a means whereby behaviour could be modified. His work suggested two educational principles:

- Put together what should go together and keep apart what should not go together.
- Reward desirable connections and make undesirable connections produce discomfort. (MacDonald, 1964:8)

This led Skinner to criticize teachers for not employing effective schedules of reinforcement in the classroom. He argued that education could be improved considerably by the adoption of four simple procedures. These are summarised here from the account written by Williams and Burden (1997:9):

- teachers should make clear what is to be taught;
- tasks should be broken down into small, sequential steps;
- students should be encouraged to work at their own pace by means of individualized learning programmes;
- learning should be ‘programmed’ by incorporating the above procedures and providing immediate positive reinforcement based as nearly as possible on 100 per cent success.

Thus whether reading, writing or arithmetic is being considered by behaviourists, development is viewed as the mastery of conditioned reflexes. This notion was elaborated by James (1958) who reduced the learning process to habit formation and identified the learning process with development. As James (1958:38), expressed it,

“Education, in short, cannot be better described than by calling it the organization of acquired habits of conduct and tendencies of behaviour.”
When this theory is applied to language learning, language is seen as behaviour to be taught. It is considered to be an accumulation of facts and skills introduced to the learner in a controlled manner by the teacher.

### 2.5.2 The Behaviourist Position Applied to Language Learning

The acquisition of a language may not initially appear to be very different from the other things that children learn. It may seem unremarkable that an English child who hears countless hours of language spoken to and around him or her will eventually begin to produce the same sounds, words, and grammatical structures. As shown above, a lot of the language children are exposed to in the form of ‘motherese’ is very repetitive, slow and grammatically uncomplicated. Parents also provide considerable encouragement for their children to speak, as can be seen in the smiles and hugs that follow the first utterance of “mamma” or “dada”. Children learn to do many things: drink from cups, get dressed, open and close doors, and even operate televisions and video players, apparently from observing and imitating the actions they see other people performing and by being reinforced by the satisfaction of the consequences of their actions. Why should language acquisition be any different?

This is essentially what behaviourists such as Thorndike, Skinner and James proposed. In essence, Skinner’s analysis of verbal behaviour is an attempt to show how language is shaped by the environment in the same way that a rat’s lever pushing or a pigeon’s key pecking can be controlled by providing and withholding food. By giving reinforcement for the sounds, words, and sentences the child produces that approximate the adult form of the language, and by withholding such reinforcement when an utterance is somehow deviant, the child’s verbal behaviour is gradually shaped over time to approximate the language of the community.

The behaviourist explanations for language acquisition offer a reasonable way of understanding how children learn some of the regular and routine aspects of language. However, they cannot explain the fact that all normal children show impressive knowledge of the syntactic structure of language despite considerable variation in their exposure to language. We also need to consider original utterances. If we simply repeated what we were exposed to, then how do we account for original phrases like ‘Look – the smoke is boiling out the chimneys!’ (three year old Willis grandchild on a winter day) and other such creative language?

### Task 6

#### Part 1

Can you think of any language classroom activities that are based on behaviourist principles? You may like to take a quick look through a unit in a typical course book.
or Teacher’s book and see how many activities are behaviourist in approach.

**Part 2**

What creative phrases have you heard children say in their first or second language? Start making a list.

### 2.5.3 The Innatist Position

Chomsky rejected as inadequate the behaviourist theories of learning. In 1959, he wrote a highly critical review of Skinner’s work. He attacked Skinner’s and other learning theories by focusing on the syntactic structure of language and the fact that all normal children show impressive knowledge of this structure despite considerable variation in their exposure to language. (N.B. when Chomsky refers to a ‘knowledge’ of language he is not talking about conscious awareness of the rules but rather the ability to form and use the rules). He also argued that the examples of language that children hear are inadequate for them to figure out the underlying generative rules on their own. Children hear only a relatively small subset of sentences, but also hear many false starts, slips of the tongue, interruptions; many of the sentences they hear are not well formed or are simplified. This input is also combined with a lot of background noise such as traffic, television, surrounding conversations. Chomsky referred to these characteristics of the input as the ‘poverty of the stimulus’, implying that the language heard by a child is not sufficiently clear, accurate or structured for a child to be able to deduce its underlying generative rules.

Chomsky perceived language as a mental faculty granted to all humans by their biology and therefore worked to develop universal laws called generative grammar that would both describe and explain all language.

He proposed, as a theoretical construct, a language acquisition device (LAD), which accepts, as input, the primary linguistic data and has, as output, a grammar of the language from which the data have been drawn.

Chomsky believed that since language cannot be acquired by environmental instruction then the syntactic patterns are innate. Children will obviously not acquire language without exposure to it, but minimal and haphazard exposure is all that is required to trigger its acquisition.

One example of this is English-speaking children’s acquisition of the past tense rule. Early on, (see the list of morphemes in 2.2 above) children tend to learn irregular past tense verbs forms, e.g. *went, bought* as lexical items. Later, when they acquire the rule that to refer to the past, you use an –*ed* ending, they switch for a time to saying *goed* or *buyed*. They may never have heard this in their input, but it happens all the
same. Sometimes both forms co-exist for a while before the incorrect form slowly falls into disuse.

For participants wanting to delve a little deeper into Chomsky’s ideas, see Lightbown and Spada (1997:15-22), or Pinker (1994).

Chomsky was interested in universals and so did not pursue such aspects as differences in rate of acquisition or smoothness of development that occur in and are probably dependant on features of the external environment. In fact he played down the effects of environment on language learning. Where he did comment on environment it was to describe the linguistic input as degenerate. This contradicts studies of mother’s speech to children, which indicate that far from being complex and ungrammatical, language addressed to young children is usually simple, and remarkably free from hesitation and deviation from grammaticality. His views do not account either for the fact that from a very early age children appear to be able to communicate very fluently. They are able to produce utterances that are not only well formed according to a linguist’s standards, but also appropriate to the social context in which the speakers find themselves. They thus appear to have acquired communicative competence appropriate to their social circumstances. Chomsky’s theories do not account for this.

### 2.5.4 Cognitive Psychology and Constructivist Theories

Linguists such as Chomsky were not alone in their criticism of Behaviourism. (Though probably not directly influencing each other, Piaget came to similar conclusions as Chomsky regarding the minimal effect of the environment on a child’s development.) Because behaviourism concentrates solely on observable behaviour, rather than on the way the human mind thinks and learns, it was also criticized for avoiding any consideration of the cognitive or mental processes that learners bring to the task of learning. Behaviourist theory, then, neglected higher processes – thought, language, and volitional behaviour.

Several psychologists, specifically Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky developed a new approach to psychology that became known as Cognitive Psychology. Cognitive psychology is concerned with the way the human mind thinks and learns. Cognitivists thus study the mental processes underlying behaviours. They reject, in principle, the possibility of accounting for complex processes in terms of simple ones, which is a basic tenet of behaviourism. The concept of cognitive structure is central to these theories. Cognitive structures are patterns of physical or mental action that underlie specific acts of intelligence.

A major theme in the theoretical framework of Cognitive Psychology is that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon
their current or past knowledge. The emphasis of Cognitivists’ work is focused on the constructive nature of the learning process. This is in direct contrast to the behaviourist theory, which, as shown above sees learning as the accumulation of facts or the development of skills. The core of constructivism is that children are involved right from birth in constructing personal meaning. They develop their own understanding of the world based on their personal experiences. The learner is brought into central focus in this learning theory (as opposed to the teacher being the centre of focus as in behaviourist theories).

**2.5.5 Piaget – The Child as a Lone Scientist**

Jean Piaget was the dominant figure in cognitive psychology for many years. The sheer quantity of Piaget’s work is impressive. Luckily M. Donaldson (1987) provides a very brief and clear account of the main features of Piaget’s theory in an appendix to her book *Children's Minds*. For participants who wish to read some of Piaget’s work, *The origins of intelligence in Children* (1966) and *The Principles of Genetic Epistemology* (1972) provide good starting points.

Piaget was primarily interested in the way people came to know things as they developed from infancy to adulthood. Piaget collected his data over a period of six decades by conducting a programme of naturalistic research on children and observing their behaviour. His research has profoundly affected our understanding of child development.

Piaget argued that cognitive structures change through the process of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation involves the interpretation of events in terms of existing cognitive structures. Whereas accommodation refers to changing cognitive structure to make sense of the environment, cognitive development consists of a constant effort to adapt to the environment in terms of assimilation and accommodation.

At the heart of Piaget’s theory is the conviction that learners’ cognitive structures develop in an age related sequence of stages. Williams and Burden (1997:21-22) summarise these stages as follows:

“For the young infant, the most important way of exploring the environment is considered by Piaget to be through the basic senses. This he calls the sensory-motor stage of learning. Gradually through the development of organized actions and thoughts, the child comes to perceive and deal with the world in more sophisticated ways. The next stage is the intuitive or pre-operational stage, which is usually considered to last between the ages of two and seven. This is when the child’s thoughts become more flexible and when memory and imagination begin to play a part. Piaget uses the term operation to refer to internalised actions, i.e. the way in
which actions become part of children’s imaginations. In these early years such operations are beginning to take place, but they are as yet quite crude and inflexible. After about the age of seven, the child is seen as entering the concrete-operational stage when the realization begins to dawn that operations can be reversed, e.g. that ice that melts into water can be frozen again into ice. This enables children to go beyond the information given but is still dependant upon concrete examples. Finally there is a move to formal operational thinking when abstract reasoning becomes increasingly possible. Piaget considered that this should not happen before the adolescent years and will tend to vary across subject areas.

Although Piaget wrote very little about the educational implications of his theory, the idea that children pass through stages of development, and the assertion that they cannot learn how to function at higher levels before they have passed through the lower ones, was taken up and formed the basis for a new theory of learning readiness. This theory assumes that development is always a prerequisite for learning and that if a child’s mental functions have not matured enough to the extent of being capable of learning a particular subject then no instruction will prove useful. Premature instruction, i.e. the teaching of a subject before the child is ready for it, is to be avoided. All effort is concentrated on finding the lower threshold of learning ability, the age at which a particular kind of learning becomes possible.

This approach is based on the premise that learning trails behind development and therefore that development outruns learning. It precludes the notion that learning may play a role in the course of development or maturation of those functions activated in the course of learning.

Piaget described children in the early stages of development as being egocentric and unable to decentre. By this he means that children in this stage of development are unable to make a distinction between themselves and the rest of the world, they do not realize that their views and needs are different from those of others. A decrease in egocentrism amounts to an increase in the ability to decentre – that is to move freely from one point of view to another.

Piaget views language as a system of symbols for representing the world. He sees this as distinct from actions and operations that form the process of reasoning.

Several studies, specifically those carried out by Vygotsky in Russia and by Donaldson and her team in Britain, have produced evidence that leads to the rejection and re-interpretation of certain features of Piaget’s theory of intellectual development. These studies focussed on the way in which language, communication and instruction affect the development of knowledge and learning. These studies led them to abandon the belief in pronounced childhood egocentrism and highlight the importance of social interaction in learning. In fact, Vygotsky and more recently,
Donaldson, put language and communication at the core of intellectual and personal development.

2.5.6 Vygotsky – The child making sense within a social context

Vygotsky worked in Russia between 1924 and 1934 when he died of tuberculosis. His work was not translated in the west until the 1960s. The most influential of his work are ‘Thought and Language’ (1962) and ‘Mind in Society’ (1978).

As noted by Wood, (1988) Vygotsky shared with Piaget a similar conception of the relations between thought and action. Also like Piaget he argued that the foundations of mental processes lie in action-in-the-world. However, Vygotsky assigned a much greater significance to the social environment than Piaget. He observed that children who were unable to complete or perform a task when left to their own devices often succeeded when they were helped by an adult. He argued that the capacity to learn through instruction is itself a fundamental feature of human intelligence.

‘Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers.’ (Vygotsky 1978)

Social interaction is thus assigned a central role in facilitating learning. For Vygotsky, a child’s potential for learning is revealed and is indeed often realised in interactions with more knowledgeable others. These ‘more knowledgeable others’ could be anyone - mother, father, siblings, teacher, and so on. In the language classroom as in other subject areas his theory provides a strong argument for mixing ability and not streaming. It also argues for learning activities that allow social interaction with peers (with teacher support), for example children in groups writing their own version of a story or book that has been read to them or one that they have read.

One of Vygotsky’s main contributions to our understanding of learning is his theory of ‘The Zone of Proximal Development’ or ZPD. This refers to

‘the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving activities with more capable peers.’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 86).

This goes along with the notion that what a child can do with assistance today he will be able to do by himself tomorrow. For Vygotsky, the foundation of learning and development is co-operatively achieved success, and the basis of that success is language and communication. There is no single ZPD for individuals because the
zone will vary depending on culture, society, and experience. Vygotsky claimed that the larger the zone, the better students will learn in school.

Task 7

- Read Van Der Stuyf, 2002, “Scaffolding as a Teaching Strategy” (Appendix C) and think of any contexts in an EFL classroom in which the notion of scaffolding would apply and benefit the learning process. How many can you think of?

Task 8

- Read the two texts reported in Appendices D and E and compare Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis.
  What have the two approaches in common? What makes them different? Would you consider “Teacher Talk” as intended by Krashen as a form of scaffolding?

In doing Task 8 you may have noted that Vygotsky’s theory is about learning in general while Krashen’s model refers to second language learning. Both theories emphasise the fact that learning means change and development from a state of “ignorance” to a state of knowledge and competence; this takes place in stages and in the presence of certain conditions, as, for example, opportunities for the learners to be exposed to something new but manageable, use of previous knowledge as a basis for internalising the input received and teacher’s supporting strategies. These three factors are shaped in different ways in the two cases. The former implies various conscious modalities while the latter expects learners to make sense and use of the input unconsciously. Both consider learning as the product of a focussed relationship between teacher and learner.

Another paper that could give you useful insights about how scaffolding contributes to learning is “Effective Talk in the Primary Classroom”. This paper reports the outcome of a research project conducted in three primary schools in the United Kingdom. We would argue that although based on the observation of lessons other than FLs, most of its key findings and its things to try in the classroom based on the findings could apply to the language classroom. A strong point of this study is that it also reads very pleasantly!

The two broad views of children’s cognitive development described above, namely the child as a ‘social being’ or the child as a ‘lone scientist’, have been concisely captured by Bruner and Haste (1987:1) in the excerpt below.
Aston University
Teaching Young Learners Unit 2

Task 9

As you read the following quote from Bruner, J. and Haste, H. Eds. (1987:1) consider the implications for teaching English as a foreign language. Consider your own context. What opportunities are there in the classroom situation for the children to function as social beings within a shared social context?

*A quiet revolution has taken place in developmental psychology in the last decade. It is not only that we have begun to think of the child as a social being – one who plays and talks with others, learns through social interactions with parents and teachers – but because we have come once more to appreciate that through such social life, the child acquires a framework for interpreting experience, and learns how to negotiate meaning in a manner congruent with the requirements of the culture. ‘Making sense’ is a social process; it is an activity that is always situated within the cultural and historical context. Before that, we had fallen into the habit of thinking of the child as ‘active scientist’, constructing hypotheses about the world, reflecting upon experience, interacting with the physical environment and formulating increasingly complex structures of thought. But this active, constructing child had been conceived as a rather isolated being, working alone at her problem-solving. Increasingly we see now that, given an appropriate, shared social context the child seems more competent as an intelligent social operator than she is a ‘lone scientist’ coping with a world of unknowns. Bruner and Haste (1987:1)*

As an extension of the topics covered in this unit, see Johnston, 2005. It’s a short article but worth reading.

2.6 Summary and discussion

We started this unit by looking at our beliefs regarding language learning. We then examined a number of different ways in which people have tried to answer the question: How do children learn languages? This covered the two main observable features of language; what children say and what they do with language. We then looked at various cognitive theories that people have used to try to explain how learning occurs. This research has all focussed on the child, whether the child is seen as an active or passive participant in the learning process, and what the child can produce and do with language.

From an early age, children appear to communicate very fluently. They are not just absorbing rules of grammar and collocation, they are also learning how to use language appropriately in a social context. This is what Halliday refers to as ‘communicative competence’. As we saw earlier, Halliday talks about the functions
Aston University
Teaching Young Learners Unit 2

of language, where he interprets ‘function’, ‘not just as the use of language but as a fundamental property of language itself, and particularly of the semantic system. ’Halliday (1985: 17).

During their first two stages, the ‘cooing’ and ‘babbling’ stages, (which normally last up to about nine months) children produce sounds, though these sounds are meaningless to adult listeners. It is when children are producing one word at a time, their holophrastic stage that these utterances begin to convey meaning. In fact, they can convey as much meaning to the adult listener as a complete sentence would have done. It is argued that, by the time children begin to learn the lexical content of the language around them they already have a fairly sound idea of how language is used for communicative purposes. The question then becomes, how do we explain the success with which very young children communicate? Halliday suggests that the answer lies in the listener having a good idea of what the child is going to say. This he believes is the most important phenomenon in human communication. We make predictions based on the context of the situation in which the interaction takes place.

The ability to convey meaning through such minimal output is therefore dependant on the ability of the more mature listener to interpret not only the utterance but also the context and the systematic relationship between the context and the utterance. This reflects Vygotsky’s theory of language being social and communicative in both origin and intent. He described how very small children who are weak and cannot sustain themselves, have many of the things they need or want supplied by other more mature members of the community. Gestures and speech serve this role giving young children a way of influencing the course of their immediate future in a way that they could not do alone. Exchanging roles during verbal exchanges appears to be a much later development in children. Halliday (1975) treats the development of dialogue as a major achievement of the period between 16 and 18 months. He sees this period as a transitional stage before the use of adult language. Evidence shows that children and adults learning L2 naturally proceed through roughly the same stages and manage to communicate what they want with very few words. But one major difference between L1 and L2 learning is that L2 learners are not learning how to mean – they already know what meanings are available to language users. However, they still have to learn a new system for expressing those meanings.

In the next unit we will explore other similarities and differences between L1 and L2 learning and focus on second language learning in schools. The children’s language learning environment thus becomes the classroom environment. The teacher has a pivotal role in the classroom.

2.6 Looking ahead
It is now time to reconsider the contents covered in this unit and try to identify the things you wish to remember because they support and facilitate learning. What about making a list of factors contributing to learning and keep it as reference for future units?

In your opinion and according to your experience how can teachers contribute to develop those factors and foster learning?

At this point you might like to compare your views with those in Williams and Burden (1997), Chapter 3.

Are there any areas from this unit that you would like to explore further?
Would you consider any of the topics covered in this unit as worthwhile for your assignment?

References:

• MacDonald, F. J. 1964. ‘The influence of learning theories on education’. *Theories of Learning and Instruction*, NSSE Yearbook, Chicago: NSSE.
• Slattery, M. and Willis, J. 2001 ‘English For Primary Teachers: a handbook of activities and classroom language’ OUP.


• **Williams, M. R. L. and Burden, R. L.** 1997. *Psychology for Language Teachers* C.U.P. Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

• **Wood, D.** 1988. *How Children Think and Learn* Blackwell Publisher

### Appendix A

Questionnaire from Lightbown and Spada. 2006. Third edition *How languages are learnt*, OUP. Pages XVII and XVIII

*See your module blackboard*

### Appendix B


### Appendix C

Van Der Stuyf, 2002, “Scaffolding as a Teaching Strategy”

*See your module blackboard*

### Appendix D


[http://www.myread.org/scaffolding.htm](http://www.myread.org/scaffolding.htm)

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Appendix E


See your module blackboard.
CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Into the classroom
3.3 Attending, concentrating and remembering
3.4 Motivation
3.5 Children’s natural learning strategies
   3.5.1 Children’s interest in language
   3.5.2 A child is not disturbed by language that he/she does not understand
   3.5.3 A child enjoys repetitive events in life and uses this to learn
   3.5.4 A child uses his primary interests
   3.5.5 A child directs his/her attention to things that are easy to understand
   3.5.6 A child possesses a natural desire to call an object by its name
   3.5.7 A child has a natural desire to participate in life around him/her.
   3.5.8 A child adds words to his/her speaking vocabulary more easily if he/she knows how to pronounce them
   3.5.9 A child immediately puts to use the language he/she is learning
   3.5.10 A child brings great ingenuity to the task of learning.
3.6 Teaching English to young learners as compared to more mature learners: some key differences
3.7 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Goals

The aim of this unit is to move from the home and L1 environment to a classroom and L2 environment and explore the differences between the two situations and ways to make the latter as successful as possible.

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- compare L1 learning in the home environment and L2 learning in the classroom
- apply theories discussed in the previous unit to second language learning and teaching
- identify and describe key factors in the process of learning a second language in an instructional setting
- use the child’s natural learning strategies as a basis for developing learning strategies in an EFL classroom situation
- identify key differences between learning and teaching English to young learners as compared to more mature learners.

Core reading

- **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P. Chapter 1
3.1 Introduction

This unit is central to the module as it looks at the situation in which most of us, as professionals, are involved and that is the teaching of English to young learners in an instructional setting. Our main concern in this unit is to get a clear overview of the features of this context and discuss the basic factors contributing to successful learning under these conditions.
3.2 Into the classroom

By the time children reach school they have a history of learning. Indeed, as was shown in the last unit, learning and development are interrelated from the very first day of child’s birth. However, for the purposes of this unit we are concerned with the development of a child’s second language which can be stimulated and developed through activities that take place within the school environment. School inevitably introduces several new elements into the process of learning for children. As Wood (1988: 213) notes,

‘Formal education faces children with many demands that are not a regular or frequent feature of their everyday experiences outside the classroom. The practice of education confronts all children with important and necessary discontinuities in their intellectual, social and linguistic experiences.’

It becomes the responsibility of teachers to ensure that the transition to an educational environment is successful.

Task 1

• Based on your observations of teaching young learners and from what you learnt in the previous unit along with your reading, what do you see as the major differences between L1 learning in the home environment and L2 learning in a classroom situation?
• Ask two of your colleagues for their opinions.
• In Appendix A there is a table that was completed by a person who is not a teacher of young learners. How do your views and those of your colleagues compare with the completed table?

You will probably have come up with a range of differences and identified similar features of our “non-expert” in the Appendix. Now compare your list to ours given below:

• When children learn a second language they are older than when they acquired their first language and tend to be influenced by the framework of their first language.
• L1 is acquired in a time range of two/four years while L2 learning is generally spread over several years.
• L1 is acquired orally while the learning of L2 in the classroom is often soon combined with reading and writing.
• In L1 learning there is regularly a direct one-to-one relationship between the child and the interlocutor, normally the child’s mother or carer. In a classroom...
the child is one of many and there are not many opportunities of direct one-to-one contact.

- Children perceive L1 as the means to communicate and be active members of the community in which they are immersed; even if the classroom rule is “speak the target language”, they do not necessarily share the same feeling about L2 and tend to use L1 when they think they cannot articulate their meanings appropriately in L2, when they do not feel like making the effort, or when they have something very important to say.

- Even if adults adapt their speech in systematic ways when talking to children, the target language is all around the L1 learner, which provides a huge amount of input to which the child is exposed. The exposure in the classroom is confined to the time of the lessons which is not so rich or as varied an environment.

- In Scrivener’s terms, the L1 input is generally “authentic” and has a specific communication purpose while input in L2 is often “restricted” and, sometimes, aims at “clarification”, that is at looking closely at “some specific pieces of language”. (Scrivener. 1996: 82 - 86).

- In the classroom generally it is the teacher who decides who is going to speak and when.

- L1 is a way to perform one’s identity; older children, especially boys, lose face when speaking a foreign language. (Brown & Levinson, 1984).

- Correction in L1 is concerned with the truth of content, while correction in L2 generally refers to the way content is expressed.

- There is rarely fossilisation or backsliding in L1 while these may be possible problems for L2 learners at all ages.

**Task 2**

- Read the text by Ellis about Second Language Acquisition (See Appendix B) and, with reference to children’s learning a second language, identify two things on which you agree with and two things you would object to. Give reasons for your choice

- Discuss your objections with a colleague or send a question to the discussion list.

Going back to the learning environment, the closest a child in school may come to experiencing L1 type learning conditions is within an international school. We then move down the scale away from the ‘ideal’ to Foreign Language medium schools where certain curriculum areas such as maths, science or art are taught in the target language, to schools where the target language is taught solely as a subject on the curriculum and all other aspects of school life are carried out in the child’s first language. As English language teachers of young learners we need to accept these
limitations and our challenge is to draw on what we know about children’s L1 learning and adapt it to our second language classrooms.

Three major issues identified in the previous unit which are important educational messages are that:

- Children are developing all the time and constantly striving to become an adult. This development moves through stages. Piaget sees these as separate stages that a child cannot pass through until s/he is ready, whereas Vygotsky shows how children can be guided and supported in their development by a teacher or other carer.
- Learning involves the continuous and active construction of knowledge. Whether one sees the child as a ‘lone scientist’ working individually through specific stages, or whether one sees children as ‘social beings’ being guided and scaffolded through their learning within their zone of proximal development, they are actively involved in the intellectual process.
- Language has a functional purpose; it is used to communicate the speaker’s needs and intentions, for social purposes, for enjoyment and play amongst other things. Language taught to YLs should be functional in the widest meaning of this term.

Two fundamental implications of these issues for us as language teachers are that children’s thinking processes are more relevant than specific overt responses, and that linguistic communication becomes a process for guiding a child’s learning, as well as a process for transferring knowledge. It follows that:

- If children can be supported in their learning by a teacher scaffolding the task, then teachers need to be aware of just what form of help scaffolding can take and what the distinct features are that differentiate it from other forms of help.
- Children need to be actively processing and experiencing the target language in the classroom. Passively observing language is not enough; they need to be encouraged to be engaged in it by both experiencing and experimenting with it.
- The language used in lessons with the children must be seen to be purposeful and have a meaning. They will not retain input that they can not link to their schemata or understanding of the world.
- Teachers should create a facilitating classroom environment providing intense opportunities for appropriate input and meaningful output.

The above section began to consider some classroom implications of children’s cognitive development which need to be taken into account by teachers of young learners. Vygotsky argued that mature mental activity involves adaptive self-regulation, which develops through social interaction. In this view, instruction and schooling play a central role in helping children discover how to pay attention, concentrate and learn effectively. Wood (1988: 55) notes that
‘when teachers are asked to evaluate a child ‘s likely potential in a particular subject or discipline’ their answer is likely to relate to a specific feature of the child’s classroom behaviour: the child’s willingness or capacity to concentrate on tasks relevant to that subject.’

The next section will take this up by focusing on children’s attention, concentration and memory.

3.3 Attending, concentrating and remembering

Teachers who have transferred from teaching older students to younger students usually comment that they find younger children more easily distracted than older ones. This is because children’s concentration spans increase with age. The ability to keep on task and to ignore distractions is in fact a symptom of the structure of the child’s intellect, and changes in concentration span are related to intellectual development.

Wood (1988: 64) suggests that one reason why older children are likely to be able to sustain longer periods of study and concentration than younger children is,

‘that they have discovered strategies such as rehearsal and organization of material for learning. Lacking such skills, the child below age eight or so is often likely to appear more impulsive and capricious than the older child.’

Vygotsky (1978) describes how a comparative investigation of human memory revealed two different types of memory. The first referred to as ‘natural memory’ arises out of the direct influence of external stimuli; it is characterized by a quality of immediacy and can be expressed by the simple stimulus response formula (S \rightarrow R). This form of memory is dominant in the behaviour of non-literate people. The second form of memory is indirect or ‘mediated memory’. This form of memory requires an intermediate link between the stimulus and the response. One of the simplest examples of this is tying a knot or notching a stick as an aid to memory. Vygotsky (1978:39) argues that

‘the use of simple memory aids extend the operation of memory beyond the biological dimensions of the human nervous system and permit it to incorporate artificial, or self-generated, stimuli, which we call signs.’

Experiments in which the participants were asked to play a game in which they were to answer a set of questions without using certain words in their answer, indicate three basic stages in the development of mediated remembering. In some of the tasks participants were provided with a set of picture cards to stimulate their memory. At the first stage (pre-school age) the child is not capable of seeing how to use the cards...
to help him/her do the task. In the second stage of development, the child’s ability to do the task is increased considerably by the introduction of the cards or other external stimuli. At this stage, the external stimuli dominate. At the third stage, adults have internalized the use of cards as cues.

Sitting, attending or listening carefully leads to demands on concentration, memory and thinking that are not a feature of ‘natural memory’. With the invention of schooling by modern societies, these demands are being put on children. In school, children must often make their line of thought contingent upon that of the teacher. Teacher questions constrain what is to be thought about. Children have to solve problems set by the teacher, not those that arise as a natural consequence of their own intentional activities.

Perceptual and attentional activities must be selected with care as they require the learner to use both memory and interpretation skills. We as teachers need to be aware of the implications of these activities when teaching young learners. Wood (1988: 70) explains this well:

‘When we ask a young child to ‘pay attention’ we must recognize that any failure to comply might not result from boredom, wilfulness or ‘distractibility’ but from the fact that he lacks the necessary knowledge and skill to bear on the task or topic at hand. This is not to say that young children (like all of us) might not concentrate or attend because they are not interested in what is going on, or because they prefer to do other things. However, we have to recognize that when we ask children to concentrate on tasks that we have set and which provide little by way of concrete, perceptual support, they may find it impossible to comply with our demands.’

Hence the need to know your learners well enough to enable you to tailor your activities to their cognitive abilities. The following task is an opportunity to further extend reflection on the teacher’s role in fostering concentration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Read Katz, 1997 (see core reading). The article refers to different relationship patterns between adults and children in different cultures and their impact on learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does the article relate to the culture of the country where you are teaching?</td>
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3.4 Motivation
T1: I’m so fed up. It doesn’t matter what we do in class there are still three children who have no motivation to work at all. They just disrupt the rest of the children. 
T2: Oh that’s a shame who are they? 
T1: X, Y and Z. 
T2 Really, they are so hard working in my lessons.

The above dialogue, though made up, is typical of so many conversations that we have heard during our teaching careers. Teachers often cite a child’s low level of motivation as a reason why children are ‘no good at learning a foreign language’. Wood (1988: 203) reminds us that

‘one of Piaget’s central messages to those involved in education must surely be that children are naturally motivated to learn (and to self-instruct). If children do not correct their own efforts, lose ‘motivation’, and find attention, concentration and self-regulation hard, as many do in mathematics lessons, then we had better look to factors in the classroom before we decide to attribute the failures exclusively to the characteristics of the child.’

In the above quote Wood was actually discussing mathematics lessons yet the comments are equally applicable to many L2 lessons. As teachers we need to ask ourselves why, when children seem so competent as learners in some contexts, do they appear to lack motivation and ability in others?

**Task 4**

- What factors you think could contribute to children’s motivation in Language lessons? Consider children at two different ages, 6 and 10, and make two lists.

**Task 5**

This task is an invitation to read two different texts on motivation with different characteristics: Chapter 6 from Williams and Burden, 1997 and Chapter 2 from Moon, 2005. The former gives you a complete panorama of the theories on motivation with reference to a general audience while the latter has a more practical perspective and refers specifically to children and… teachers.

- Read Williams and Burden, 1997, Chapter 6 ‘What makes a person want to learn? Motivation in language learning’. While reading pick out the aspects that are particularly relevant to primary school age children.

- Refer back to your list of factors affecting motivation. To what extent does your own list compare to the issues you picked out from the Williams and Burden chapter?
• Read Moon, 2005, Chapter 2 “Do you like English?” Identify an activity which would be suitable for one of your classes and give reasons for your choice.

An aspect I (Rita) find very important in Williams and Burden is the distinction between initiating and sustaining motivation as this, in my opinion, is a key issue in the language classroom at all ages. In fact a frequent experience in many classes is the progressive fading of the strong motivation observable at the beginning of a course; this is brought about by a variety of reasons: difficulties arise and there is not enough support; the teaching is repetitive and students get bored; the students’ learning potential is overestimated and too heavy demands are put on them; the students’ learning potential is underestimated and they are taught much less than they could achieve. The latter is rather common at primary school when teachers are afraid of making things too difficult and children are taught just colours, easy numbers and the names of some animals in the first year and then very little new stuff is added in the following years! The result is that they just give up their original active participation.

Many of the factors identified by Williams and Burden as having an effect on motivation, such as the perceived value of the activity, the degree of challenge and the purpose of the activity, are found in Feuerstein’s theory of mediation.

Feuerstein, like Vygotsky, suggests that a child’s learning is shaped from the very start by the intervention of significant adults. These adults are referred to as mediators. He describes twelve features of mediation and here we will look briefly at the first three, as he considers them essential for all learning tasks.

**Significance:**
The teacher needs to make learners aware of the significance of the learning task so that they can see the value of it to them personally, and in a broader cultural context.

**Purpose beyond the here and now:**
In addition, learners must be aware of the way in which the learning experience will have wider relevance to them beyond the immediate time and place.

**Shared intention:**
In presenting a task, the teacher must have a clear intention, which is understood and reciprocated by the learners.

Williams and Burden (1997: Chapter 4) provides a very a clear discussion and summary of Feuerstein’s work and this is part of the core reading for this Unit. For those of you who would like to read Feuerstein’s work in more depth see Feuerstein, Klein. and Tannenbaum, (1991).
3.5 Children’s natural learning strategies

Learning strategies are essential prerequisites for any successful learning attempt, irrespective of the given situation, environment or teaching style.

Task 5

- Read Williams and Burden Chapter 7, pp 143-156, on language learning strategies, and note down the points you feel are particularly relevant to children learning a new language.

The previous unit described how studies of first language learning showed that both children and parents intuitively develop strategies that promote acquisition of the first language. However, we also discussed above the demands on concentration, memory and thinking that are not a feature of ‘natural memory’ but which are required for formal education. We will now consider to what extent these ‘natural’ strategies are or can be used by young children when learning a second language in a formal classroom situation.

Research by Weinstein and Mayer (1985) suggests that the three basic general learning strategies are organizing, rehearsing, and elaboration. In addition, Valcárel, Verdu and Coyle (1997) described a case study based on classroom research in Spain from which they were able to develop a classification of children’s cognitive learning strategies for EFL. These include: guessing for global comprehension, mentally labelling specific meanings, imitation, practising meaningfully, recombining and overcoming limitations in oral/written production. In another study Coyle and Valcárcel (2002) report about children using metacognitive and social/affective strategies and cognitive strategies “with the latter classified according to the higher level processes of Comprehension, Retention and Language use”. (Ibid: 443) The communication strategies used by eleven-year-old children in a one to one encounter with a native speaker are described in Szulc-Kurpaska (2000) which is part of the recommended reading.

McGlothlin (1977) gives a descriptive account of children’s language learning strategies based on the observation of his child first language acquisition. As one of the stated aims of our course is to help you to “theorise your practice”, in the following sections we will go through McGlothlin’s categories of children’s learning strategies one by one and attempt to theorise his speculations by linking his framework to the theories described in the previous unit. We will then consider the consequences or implications of each for the EFL classroom.

3.5.1 Children’s interest in language
A child is not interested in language for its own sake but as a medium to express meaning. This is what Halliday refers to when he speaks of language as ‘a social semiotic’ (1978) and refers to language as a resource for meaning. Halliday relates meanings to linguistic functions, to the functions that language is made to serve in the life of the growing child. A child learning his first language is learning how to mean. A school child learning a second language has already learnt how to ‘mean’ in his first language and therefore knows (at a subconscious level) the potential of language.

It follows from this that children should be encouraged from the start to see that the second language is simply a different means of expressing meanings. As many opportunities as possible should be provided for the children to use the language. If this results in children initially producing one word, formulated phrases or even incorrect utterances, the teacher should attempt to understand and react to the illocutionary force behind the speech. The teacher might remodel the speech but not force the child to rephrase his/her speech or insist on correctness. If the teacher understands the child’s speech then the child has accomplished his/her task and should be given recognition that s/he has been understood and that his/her contribution has been of value in the interaction.

3.5.2 A child is not disturbed by language that he/she does not understand.

This is related to the fact that language is never the centre of a child’s attention. A child does not have to understand every word that is spoken, either at home or at school; it’s the gist that’s more important. Children come to the classroom with some knowledge and conception of the topic they are faced with. This comes from previous personal experiences, talking with parents and friends and from television, books and videos. These conceptions or schemata are the children’s current ideas, what they use to make sense of their every day experiences. The teacher’s aim is to develop the schemata by providing a range of inputs such as talking, demonstrating, showing pictures and getting children involved in various tasks. The child attempts to make sense of the inputs by constructing links with prior knowledge, not by trying to understand every word.

This is what McGlothlin says, but what is your experience? My (Rita’s) own feeling is that we need to be cautious about making such generalizations in the case of FLs as, in my experience, in the classroom situation, children may be “disturbed” when they do not understand; they may feel frustrated and this is one of the reasons why some switch off and become naughty.

Focusing on the gist should, however, be encouraged and learners should be supported in their efforts to make sense from the whole discourse in context and not just one word or utterance, to accept partial comprehension and to cope with
uncertainty deriving from not being sure about the gist of what they hear. The educational implication of this is for teachers to use natural language with children but starting with and building on familiar contexts. Stories are an ideal medium for this as few contexts are more meaningful than a story. Most children’s books have bright illustrations and a clear, structured story line. Stories contain cohesive devices typical of narrative text and are an exposition of thought and language. Features such as these are sadly missing in many course books, which tend to consist of short texts that bear little if any relation to each other.

There is a belief held by many teachers that we have met that a child must know all the words and tenses in a text before the text is presented. This stems from an over application of behaviourist theories. The belief is unfortunately also held by many writers of children’s materials and publishers who insist on producing structured textbooks, which will not enable a child to be exposed to a verb in the past tense until it has been taught in class. This is in fact very limiting and can be detrimental as it exposes children to a reductionist version of the language that is very stilted and unnatural.

**Task 6**

- Think of sources (other than stories) of natural language that could be used in the L2 classroom. What features of the source make them a good teaching material? Give a brief description of how they could be used.

Probably you thought of such simple things as calendars and brochures and richer sources such as films, cartoons, children’s magazines and activity books for native speaker children. All these can be successfully accessed by young learners provided they are of an appropriate level of challenge.

**3.5.3 A child enjoys repetitive events and uses this to learn**

A child enjoys repetitive events in life, and uses this enjoyment to help him/her learn. All participants with access to young children will know that they can watch a video over and over whereas adults will generally only watch a film once. It is not until children are about ten or eleven that they begin to watch films less repeatedly.

**Task 7**

- What events in lessons can usefully be repetitive? (and fun?) Make a short list.

Multiple presentations as well as multiple opportunities for the learner to practice are considered by Spolsky (1989) to be an important condition in second language learning.
learning. But although children enjoy hearing certain material repeated, they do not generally want to hear the same material repeated to them without good reason. Enjoyment is a very good reason. Fortunately, there are a vast number of stories that contain motivating repetition within them. Teachers should not be worried about repeating a story that has been popular with a class. Recycling and repetition provides children with repeated meetings with words which helps them to internalise their meaning and use (Trelease, 1982).

In her research into how children complete tasks, Pinter (1999) found that one of the main strategies used was ‘building patterns’ whereby children repeated what they were comfortable with over and over again. She noted that the children played safe and tried to exploit a given phrase as much as possible.

Playing games is something children also like doing over and over again and which can have similar benefits. Appendix D is an example of how a game based on attention and total physical response can become a source of varied input.

3.5.4 A child uses his/her primary interests

A child uses his/her primary interests to help him/her to learn the language. Do not assume children will be interested in what we think will interest them. Task 8 is an opportunity of further reflection on this issue.

Task 8

- Read the following extracts from, Holt, 1984: 290- 293 and identify the implications of his statements for the teaching of English as a foreign language.

What is essential is to realize that children learn independently, not in bunches; that they learn out of interest and curiosity, not to please or appease the adults in power; they ought to be in control of their own learning, deciding for themselves what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.

The learner, young or old, is the best judge of what he should learn... I would trust the child to direct his own learning... in our struggle to make sense of our life, the things we most need to learn are the things we most want to learn... we do not need to “motivate” children into learning, by wheedling, bribing, or bullying. We do not need to keep picking away at their minds to make sure they are learning. What we need to do, and, and all we need to do, is bring as much of the world as we can into the school and the classroom; give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for; listen respectfully when they feel like talking; and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest.
• To what extent is this possible in your situation? What factors would or could prevent children becoming more active in the planning?
• List ways that children could be involved at some level in planning in your school. Try to compare these with colleagues from a different school.
• With reference to EFL context what does “bring as much of the world as we can into the school and the classroom; give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for” involve?

Holt’s approach may seem to be a very radical stance to many teachers and curriculum planners. However, if teachers take the time to ask what the children in their class are interested in and try to involve them at some level in planning, be it selection of class readers or the next topic, it will be more relevant and of greater interest to the children.

3.5.5 A child directs his/her attention to things that are easy to understand.

McGlothlin points out that children think about the people and things that are around them, things that can easily be given a name. The words that are easy to learn from context are mostly nouns. As shown in Unit 2 research has provided a large data bank of children’s early utterances. This has revealed findings that are congruent to those found by McGlothlin, that the great majority of a child’s first language early vocabulary consists of nouns with a distinct lack of verbs, adjectives and prepositions.

McGlothlin claims that young children direct their attention to things that are easy to understand, that they do not think about things like the world economy or foreign cultures. While this may be true for very young children, it is not long, as most parents learn, before children begin to ask questions about everything. I (Nikki) remember being asked questions by my son, such as; where does the moon go in the day? How do aeroplanes stay up in the sky? Where do babies come from? None of which are very easy to explain to a four or five year old. The child, as Holt (1983: 287) notes, is curious. ‘He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and the environment, do what he can see other people doing.’ Thus, later on, children direct their attention, not just to things that are easy to learn but to things that help them to make sense of the world.

With reference to FL language learning it could be argued that this strategy brings both advantages and drawbacks. In many EFL classes it has been noticed that children tend to use the words and expressions they find easy to grasp but also to avoid systematically those they perceive as difficult, especially difficult to pronounce. Another observation is that teachers should appreciate one word
utterances that show the children’s desire to communicate without insisting on their production of complete sentences.

**3.5.6 A child possesses a natural desire to call an object by its name.**

I (Nikki) have noticed that my own son is constantly asking what the English or Turkish word for various objects is. Halliday (1975: 43) explains the main functional impetus behind young children learning words as being that of learning about their environment.

‘The new words function mainly as a means of categorizing observed phenomena, and provide the earliest instance of the use of language as a means of learning’.

Probably this works better in first language acquisition and in bilingual contexts. In FL contexts children tend to switch to first language when they do not know a term. In this case the teacher can reword their utterances supplying the target language equivalent and thus indirectly exploiting L1 as a bridge to L2.

**3.5.7 A child has a natural desire to participate in life around him/her.**

Children use their natural desire to participate in the life around them to help them learn new language. They want to do what they see others doing, and when that includes language, they want to speak it too. Learners with a teacher who uses the target language in informal situations and does not just guide them through a coursebook will be encouraged to experiment with language. Children will even say things that they do not understand at all because they have learned that in a given situation, a word or phrase is always used, so they try to use it too. McGlothlin used the example of his son using the word ‘thank you’ even though he hadn’t been taught to say thank you.

**Task 9**

- Think of how you can create opportunities both inside and outside the L2 classroom for informal interaction with the children and where the children can be encouraged to use English to interact with each other.

What about saying “Happy Birthday” when there is a birthday or making a comment on the weather or discussing attendance, holidays and festivities?

Unfortunately, it would seem from my (Nikki’s) observations and from those of my colleagues, that this natural desire to participate in life is very rarely encouraged in the classroom. In fact, in many cases, the opposite seems to be happening. Bloor (1991) in her discussion of the role of informal language in the classroom notes that
'studies of classroom research have shown that in most native-speaker classrooms language is used for functions other than direct teaching. I am assuming that by ‘native-speaker’ Bloor is referring to ‘native English speaking teachers’. My observations in Turkey have supported Bloor’s findings that native English speakers new to Turkey use a lot of English for non-lesson directed activities or social functions. Examples of these are teachers greeting the children, asking a child to open a window, close a door or to take a message to another teacher. However, as the native teacher’s Turkish increases, quite often they use Turkish increasingly for these social functions. This could be because on a practical level it makes the job quicker. Unfortunately, my observations have shown that social interaction that takes place between Turkish English Language teachers and Turkish children in second language classrooms generally takes place in Turkish language, thereby reducing the opportunities for meaningful interaction in the target language. You may like to reflect on how far this is the case in YL classrooms in your context.

3.5.8 A child adds words to his/her speaking vocabulary more easily if he/she knows how to pronounce them

A child adds words to his/her speaking vocabulary more easily if he/she already knows how to pronounce them (or is able to pronounce words with a strong similarity to them). For young children the first image they use is probably not a visual one but what might be called an acoustic image. Very young children, before eighteen months or so, begin to construct some kind of imitative phonological system based on the adult speech that they hear. They listen, they hear sounds, and the rhythm of the sounds becomes meaningful. This is also true for young children learning a second language.

Rixon (1999) points out how the pronunciation of English presents some difficulties for learners in relation to many native languages. ‘The large number of vowel phonemes (twenty in R. P.) compared with the five or seven in many languages such as Italian or Spanish, the ‘richness’ of English when it comes to consonant clutters, and the much more variable position of stress-placement on syllable in lexical items compared to many languages’ (Rixon 1999: 66) are main causes of pronunciation difficulties. It follows that children need time to ‘tune in’ to intonation patterns in English.

Normal English speech is often characterized as ‘stress timed’, that is highly regular in its rhythmic patterning no matter how many syllables. (See MET Unit 4 for further discussion on this). “Motherese” as shown in the previous unit is more rhythmic than normal adult speech. Research by Kolsawalla (1999) into teaching vocabulary through rhythmic refrains in stories suggests that vocabulary elements presented within a rhythmic refrain within a story are more readily recalled than those within the prose narration of a story. She concludes by suggesting ‘that it therefore seems
that including key words in the rhythmic element of a story is a pedagogic choice which would help to expedite the recall of new words in a target language.’ Kolsawalla (1999:26)

**Task 10**

- In your experience do children tend to turn to the spoken or written form to learn new words? Have you noticed any difference between YLs of different ages?

- What teaching methods and aids can you think of that support the need for children to tune in to the sounds of English words?

### 3.5.9 A child immediately puts to use the language he/she is learning

A child immediately puts to use the language he/she is learning and he/she uses his/her success in communication to build confidence. We feel a bit sceptical about this claim as this depends a lot on the children’s individual attitudes. However most teachers of young learners would argue that the language is only put to use after enough exposure. McGlothlin suggests that the child ‘does not try to store up his knowledge for use at later date. He applies it in context as soon as he can.’ How do you feel about this claim?

A teaching colleague provided the following example of children putting to use the language they were learning. Everyday before lunch the children were told by their teacher, ‘Wash your hands please.’ If the children wished to wash their hands at other times during the day they asked ‘Wash your hands?’ using a rising intonation pattern. The children had developed the phonological skills to use a rising intonation pattern to produce questions but had not yet acquired the ability to use the inversion form to produce a question or to change your to *my*. The children were therefore drawing on their limited linguistic resources to put to use the language they were learning.

The same children discussed above who were not yet able to ask ‘Can I wash my hands? were however regularly using the inversion form ‘Can I have a ______ please?’ This was possibly because the teacher regularly used the inversion form ‘Can I have ______?’ with food vocabulary at the dinner table. She strategically placed objects on the table so certain things would be out of her reach so she would have to ask the children to pass things to her. Other things would be out of reach of
the children, thus putting them in a position where they would have to ask her to pass the object to them. The children had learned the formula and were able to use the phrase ‘Can I have _______?’ as a chunk with food vocabulary, but had not yet acquired the ability to generate for themselves inverted question forms.

**Task 11**

Analyse the following examples of spontaneous talk by children learning English as an FL. What is their attitude to English? What does each of them know?

- During an English lesson in a nine year old class in Spain, the teacher was complaining (in Spanish) because the children were rather noisy: She said (in Spanish): “last year you were quieter”. One of the children commented (in English): “once upon a time…”

- One day an American headmaster came to visit an Italian school. He left the building at the time the children were going home. Three children heard him speaking English and started discussing in Italian about asking or not asking him something in English. One decided to try. He approached the gentleman and asked: what is your name? He answered politely: Richard, and your name? The boy didn’t answer. The headmaster repeated his question very slowly and separating each word: What is your name? This time the boy understood and answered.

- A group of professionals were visiting a Norwegian school and observed an English lesson. After the lesson there was a break and they were going to the staff room for a cup of coffee. In the corridor they were approached by one of the children from the previous class who said: I am a lion and live in the forest. What are you? The group did not expect this question and could not hide their amazement… After some silent moments one saved the situation and responded pretending she too was an animal.

Probably you have noticed that these three children used English without any stimulus or initiation by teacher or adult. The Spanish child responded to the teacher in English using a chunk she had heard from the teacher telling stories. She knew that “once upon a time” refers to the past but she had not grasped the exact meaning yet. The Italian child showed an exceptional willingness to use his English but he found it difficult to understand an American native speaker and, may be, the non-formulaic way the question was asked. And to finish the story, here is the translation of the comment of the two who had not dared to approach the foreigner speaking English. “We told you it would be too difficult!” The Norwegian child transferred to real life
the language of an imaginative activity which is rather common in primary classrooms.

### Task 12

- The extract in Appendix E from Ellis. 1997 reports a case study of two child learners. What are your observations? Do they coincide with those of the author?

### 3.5.10 A child brings great ingenuity to the task of learning.

Ingenuity involves creativity and imagination. It is accompanied by adaptability, and willingness for improvisation and experimentation. This is often characterised by playfulness along with a high level of interest, engagement, noise and confidence. Unfortunately, these characteristics are often discouraged in the classroom. Thus, children’s natural ingenuity is all too easily stifled.

A colleague of mine (Nikki) recently gave me a wonderful example of this ingenuity from her class of preschool EFL children. She had read Colin West’s story ‘Not me, said the monkey’ to her class. Three months later, she was having lunch with the class and had a jug of water in her hand.

Teacher: Aykun, do you want more water?
Aykun: Not me said the monkey!
Sinan: Not me said the elephant!
Melis: Not me said the giraffe!
All: Laughter

The children had produced a formulaic response to the question using a phrase encountered in the story. The meaning carried by the utterance was perfectly clear, as it was obvious that it was Aykun and not the monkey that did not want the water. This relates back to the child using his natural desire to participate in life around him and entertain whilst using their linguistic resources at hand to express meaning.

So far this unit has looked at children’s natural learning strategies and the way these can be employed in a classroom situation. Very often, unfortunately, children are not given an opportunity to use their natural learning strategies. This can happen when methods are used that require strategies such as organization and rehearsal. Section 3.3 above highlighted the fact that these can be beyond young children’s ability.

Children usually attempt to make productive use of what they learn in the lessons that they are taught. But as Wood (1988: 212) points out ‘sometimes, perhaps often, what they try to generalize from is poorly founded.’ Here is an example from an Italian
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Teaching Young Learners Unit 3

pre-school class: a four-year-old group had their first English lesson with a native speaker teacher. She used toy animals to teach elephant and giraffe. These two words are very similar to their Italian equivalents that, however, are pronounced with a final vowel (elefante, giraffa). One child went home and said to her mother (in Italian): *I know English… it’s enough to drop the final part of each Italian word!*

One teacher who works mainly with young learners was of the opinion that although kids are fun, you have to be patient and this can be frustrating. She said she had followed the course book, taught them all the words and patterns over and over again, and had given them numerous activities and exercises to do. However, even after two years, they still didn’t speak English. They knew the songs and rhymes – but just wouldn’t speak. From our experience, this is fairly typical.

**Task 13**

- Make a list of possible reasons of the situation described above
- Read Lan (1994) and Yazigi and Seedhouse, 2005 (see core reading) and compare the situations described in the articles with a situation you are familiar with
- Do you agree with the “strategies for maximizing opportunities for use” suggested in the Lan article? Are there any to which you would object? What is your opinion about pair-work? Give reasons for your answers.
- With reference to the Yazigi and Seedhouse article, how could “circle time activities” be adapted to your situation?

If you are interested in seeing how McGlothin’s principles have been interpreted in a programme to teach English to children in Russia you can read Yaverbaum, 2003. If you would like to revisit the content of this unit with special reference to very young learners, read McLlvain (undated) (See recommended reading).

**Task 14**

In this Unit you have reflected on various texts describing the strategies used by second language learners and especially those reported by McGlothin (1997), Coyle and Valcárcel (2002), William and Burden, (1997) Chapter 7.
- From your own observation of young children, which of the three depicts them most accurately?
- Combining what you have read in the above texts and your own observations of learners, make your own list of strategies used by children to learn and practise language.
3.6 Teaching English to young learners as compared to more mature learners: some key differences.

Having focused in Unit 2 and so far in Unit 3 on the question of how young children learn first and second languages, you should now be ready to compare some of the differences between young learners and more mature learners. We will use Rogers’ (1986) analysis of adult learners as a starting point for our comparison. In analysing adult learners, Rogers argues that irrespective of their specific context, adult learners share seven general characteristics which have implications for the teacher. As you read them, do Task 15. Note that Rogers is not referring specifically to adults as language learners but as learners in general. Many of the characteristics that Rogers identifies as features of the adult learner are true to a certain extent for the YL.

Task 15

For each of Rogers’ characteristics below, make notes about how it may or may not apply to YLs. Make sure that you make reference to YLs’ cognitive development as well as their emotional needs and memory processes in order to provide a theoretical justification for your comments. If you wanted, you could do this task for two age groups: 5/6 year olds and 10 year olds.

If you have concrete experience of YLs, try to illustrate each point with concrete evidence.

When you have finished, you can read the general comments in Appendix F.

1. The student participants are adults by definition.
Implications: Some are more adult than others are; some are searching in education for dependency, others for autonomy.

2 They are in a continuing process of growth, not at the start of a process.
Implications: All are growing and developing, but in different directions and at different paces.

3 They bring with them a package of experience and values.
Implications: Some bring a good deal of experience and knowledge, others bring less, and there are varying degrees of willingness to use this material to help the learning process.

4 They come to education with intentions.
Implications: They have a wide range of intentions and needs, some specific, some more general; some related to the subject matter under discussion, and others unknown even to themselves.

5 They bring expectations about the learning process.
Implications: They are all at different points in the spectrum between those who require to be taught everything and those who wish to find out for themselves; and they each have consciousness of what they can and cannot do in the way of learning.

6 They have competing interests.
Implications: They all have competing interests which may always or sometimes be of greater importance than their learning.

7 They already have their own set patterns of learning.
Implications: And they have all by now acquired their own ways of learning, which vary considerably the one from the other.’ (Rogers 1986: 24-34)

How did the Appendix comments compare with yours? Are any of these comments true for the YL teaching contexts you have worked in?

3.7 Looking ahead

At the beginning of this unit we saw how education faces children with many demands that are not a regular feature of their everyday experiences outside the classroom. Within a classroom situation the teacher takes on a pivotal role of the significant other that outside the classroom is generally held by parents or elder siblings.

We then began to look at the classroom environment for second language lessons and at two important psychological factors that affect children’s learning within it, namely concentration and motivation. We moved on to look at the extent to which children’s natural learning strategies can be harnessed to enhance second language learning in a classroom environment. This along with reading from the previous unit will provide you with a foundation for Unit 4 where we consider approaches and activity types suitable for young learners.

The extent to which children will be encouraged to employ their natural learning strategies will depend largely on the teacher’s beliefs regarding how children learn and the functional purpose of language along with the value they place on comprehensible input and social interaction in the learning process.

In order to complete this section of the module we will return to the Lightbrown and Spada questionnaire that you completed at the beginning of Unit 2. Spend a few
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Teaching Young Learners Unit 3

minutes looking over your initial responses to the questions. Have your views altered at all during the course of these two components? What theoretical justification can you now give to support your views?

What about focussing on one of McGlothlin’s strategies and see how it works with children of a specific context and age? Or seeing how your list from Task 14 is confirmed or disconfirmed by observation? Any other issues to discuss or worth further study? Any ideas for your assignment?

Write three things from this unit that you wish to try when teaching young learners.

References

- **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P. Chapter 1
- **Galton, M.** 1998. Reliving the ORACLE Experience: Back to the Basics or Back to the Future? University of Warwick: Center for Research in Elementary and Primary Education.
• Lightbown, P. and Spada N. 2006. How Languages are Learned O.U.P. Chapter 2.


**Acknowledgments**
Nikki would like to thank Paula de Nagy and Jane Willis for their suggestions and contributions to this unit.

**Appendix A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>L1 learning</th>
<th>L2 Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most children constantly talk when playing with toys like dolls/soldiers - to themselves, to their toys, to their peers.</td>
<td>Children are not normally free to babble or talk out of turn. Turn-taking and noise level normally tightly controlled by the teacher. And in group work with peers, L1 is usually the norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s no escape; if they are not understood when they say something, they have to try again.</td>
<td>Can always retreat to mother-tongue if not understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive environment; carers are always positive about children’s attempts to say anything, even if it only barely approximates what the standard word/phrase sounds like.</td>
<td>Teachers often feel that they have to correct mistakes because that is part and parcel of teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix B**


See your module blackboard

**Appendix C**

*Written by Nikki Dereboy
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008*

See your module blackboard

Appendix D

Simon says

The teacher tells the children they will be given instructions but they have to follow them only if they are preceded by “Simon says”. The players who make a mistake (wrong action or following of instructions not preceded by “Simon says” are out). The winner is the last remaining player, who then becomes “Simon”.

Apart from saying or not saying “Simon says” here are some examples of how the same instruction can be given in different ways and be a source of varied input.

Show your right hand
Let me see your right hand
Raise your right hand

Make two steps forward/backwards
Walk two steps forward/backwards

And then there can be an endless variation of verbs; put... touch....hide... point to... put... and a great variety of places in the...under the... behind the... etc.

Appendix E


See your module blackboard

Appendix F

Comparison of Roger’ seven characteristics of adults with those of YLs

1. The student participants are adults by definition.
Implications: Some are more adult than others are; some are still searching in education for dependency, others for autonomy.

We stated in Unit 1 that we are defining YLs as being between the ages of four, when in most countries children enter nursery school, and twelve, when they leave primary
school for secondary school. Thus, we could say that the participants in a nursery or primary school classroom are Young Learners by definition yet the definition of what a Young Learner is and thus can do varies greatly over this age range. Your reading on Piaget and Vygotsky shows how children are developing all the time and constantly striving to be an adult and that this development moves through stages. Children between the age of seven and eleven have not yet moved to formal operational thinking when abstract thinking becomes increasingly possible, they are still dependant on concrete examples. This has implications for their ability to analyse patterns in a language. Older children are able to harness strategies such as rehearsal and organization in order to sustain longer periods of study than children below the age of eight who are still lacking in these skills.

Rogers’ comments in this section (1986: 24) suggest that the adult learner is not a finished product but is on the path to greater maturity. This is true for YLs too but they obviously have a much longer journey in front of them.

2. They are in a continuing process of growth, not at the start of a progress.
Implications: All are growing and developing, but in different directions and at different pace.

This is true for children; they too are in a continuing process of growth as was mentioned in response to section one above. Just like adults, within any one class, you find a wide range of ability and competence with children developing at different levels and paces.

Formal education faces children with many demands that are not a feature of their everyday experiences outside the classroom. Young children starting school for the first time need time to adjust to these new demands. Older children with experience of school should have made the transition to the educational environment yet they are still growing and developing both physically and psychologically.

3 They bring with them a package of experience and values.
Implications: Some bring a good deal of experience and knowledge, others bring less, and there are varying degrees of willingness to use this material to help the learning process.

Children when they reach school all have a history of learning. They do not arrive in our classes as empty vessels to be filled. They already have well developed schemata. In order to retain input, they need to be able to link new knowledge to their schemata and their understanding of the world.

4 They come to education with intentions.
Implications: They have a wide range of intentions and needs, some of these are specific, some more general and related to the subject matter under discussion, and others are unknown even to themselves.

When I recently asked my class of six year olds what they hoped to learn from school, they came up with statements like: ‘I want to be able to write longer stories.’ ‘I want to be able to write better.’ ‘I want to get on to the same reading level as Alara.’ These all reflected short term goals linked to work we had currently been doing in class, yet they clearly had their own goals and intentions. As we saw earlier, children are naturally motivated to learn but they still need to be actively processing the information and the language used in lessons needs to be seen as purposeful and have meaning. Their motivation level tends to drop if they feel they are failing – they will give up sooner than adults. As children have such short-term goals, they need to perceive the benefits of their work, and are not willing or able to delay gratification. Age affects children’s perceptions of their goals and intentions; the older the child, the more awareness they will have of the future and the more they are able to see what benefits learning a language can bring them in later life.

5 They bring expectations about the learning process.
Implications: They are all at different points in the spectrum between those who require to be taught everything and those who wish to find out for themselves. They each have consciousness of what they can and cannot do in the way of learning.

Expectations of both Young Learners and more mature learners will be influenced by previous experiences, often determined by the education system in which they are learning. Adults obviously will have had a more varied experience. It is important that language teachers of Young Learners, especially those educated and trained in a different country, are aware of the expectations of the national education system and of the teachers working within it. Teachers with very different expectations can confuse and unsettle learners.

6 They have competing interests
Implications: They all have competing interests of greater importance than their learning.

Adults and YLs probably differ the most in this area. Adults often have families and jobs that prevent them from devoting their full attention to their studies. In my own case both while studying for my masters and more recently while writing these units I have had my son complaining about the amount of time that Mum sits in front of the computer and felt guilty about the lack of time I am able to give to my own school work. Children, on the other hand, have a large amount of time allocated during which they are expected to spend time in formal learning environments.
7 They already have their own set patterns of learning
Implications: And they have all by now acquired their own ways of learning, which vary considerably the one from the other.’ (Rogers 1986: 24-34)

Young children new to school will have developed natural learning strategies such as those illustrated by McGlothin (1999). The challenge for teachers is to help children develop the new skills needed for formal education, such as increasing their concentration spans, attending and listening carefully. Older children, with more experience of formal learning, will probably have acquired their own style of learning, and this will have been influenced by the style of the teacher and the local education system.
TYL Unit 4
Approaches to early L2 teaching

CONTENTS

Goals
Readings

Preliminary Task

4.1 Introduction
4.2 The influence of traditional methods on teaching and materials for young learners
4.3 Content-based approaches and young learners
   4.3.1 General Characteristics
   4.3.2 Topic-based approach
   4.3.3 Cross-curricular approach
   4.3.4 Activity-based approach
   4.3.5 Task-based approach
4.4 The impact of direct language tuition on young learners
4.5 The role of the environment in motivating and supporting learning
4.6 Looking ahead

References

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Appendix G

Goals

The aim of this unit is to explore a set of teaching principles and approaches to teaching languages to young learners and to evaluate them according to criteria of feasibility, suitability and effectiveness with reference to children in general and your teaching situation in particular.

By the end of this unit you should:

• Be informed about a variety of methods and approaches and be able to identify their features
• Be able to identify your teaching and learning theories from the analysis of recorded lessons
• Be aware of the criteria to consider in the choice of methods and approaches for a specific context
• Be able to develop a teaching approach suitable for your specific context.

Reading

Core reading

• **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P. Chapters 2 and 8.

Recommended reading

• **Halliwell, S.** 1992 Teaching English in the Primary Classroom. Longman Chapters 3 and 6.
• **Lightbown, P.** and **Spada N.** 2006. *How Languages are Learned*. O.U.P. Chapter 6.
• **Lucietto, S.** 2006. “Subject Materials and Publishers’ Websites for the CLIL Teacher: Context and rationale” in *IATEFL Young Learners Publication* number 2.
Preliminary Task

For this Unit, it is important that you collect some data from ‘real’ classrooms.

If you teach YLs, you may wish to record yourself teaching two lessons. If this is not possible, ask if you can record a colleague.

The purposes of these data are two-fold:
- they should help you identify the pedagogic principles underlying the lessons and articulate your beliefs about teaching and learning
- In Unit 7, you will be asked to analyse the extracts in more detail and to use them to focus on the use of language in the classroom. You will need samples of whole class activities as well as pair- and group-work. Ideally, both teacher and students should be heard (you may wish to set up your recording to highlight one particular group as it is often difficult to get clear recordings of all participants).

There is some advice on audio-recording at the end of Unit 8 in Appendix C – you may like to look ahead at this now.

If you prefer, and you have the facilities for doing so, instead of audio recording the lessons, you could video them. Whichever you do, try, as far as possible, not to interfere with the normal lesson so that you can obtain as genuine a recording as possible. Having said that, it will be almost impossible for the recording to be totally typical of “normal lesson”, as children are likely to get excited by the process and teachers may become nervous. Do your best!

Here are some suggestions for a first analysis of the lessons (choose the points that interest you more and remember that some might not apply to your lessons: Example: not all lessons include writing).

Find out and make examples from the recordings of
- phases in which the children are engaged in listening (to the teacher? To a recording? To their peers? What’s the content of what they are asked to listen? What’s the purpose of the listening?)
- children talking (who do they talk to? Purpose? Is it the result of personal initiative or is it part of the required “practice?” In this latter case, are they asked to follow a pattern or free to choose form? Is content pre-determined?)

phases in which the children are engaged in writing (Purpose? Type of writing? Type of text? Who will be the reader?)

phases in which the children are engaged in games or other playful activities

phases in which you use visual aids (which aids? Purpose?)

times at which you use L1 and times at which you use the target language (for which purpose?)

an activity you are particularly happy about (give reasons)

The way teachers organise their lessons reflects their beliefs about teaching and learning. What has this analysis revealed to you?

Appendix A offers a random collection of (sometimes contrasting) statements about how children are supposed to learn and consequently how they should be taught.

- Which, if any, would be suitable to describe your way of looking at learners and your teaching practice?
- Could you write a statement expressing your beliefs about teaching and learning as they emerge from the lessons you have recorded?

4.1 Introduction

So far in the Module, we have considered the expansion of the teaching of English to young learners in relation to the international situation and your local context (Unit 1) and children’s cognitive development and how this affects first language acquisition (Unit 2), while in Unit 3 we reflected on children as second language learners. Unit 4 builds on those three Units and invites you to explore some approaches and principles to teaching YLs, and the types of activities deriving from them. You will then be asked to identify criteria to construct your own pedagogy. The data collected in the preliminary task will form an integral part of the Module, and can be used again in later Units. (You may also be able to ‘recycle’ it for another Module.)

Before going further we wish to attract your attention to a question frequently asked by teachers and invite you to give your personal answer to it.

Task 1
• Is there a best method to teach an L2 to children?

Justify your answer with contributions from the literature and your experience.

Although the idea of, at least, “good” methods to rely on may seem attractive and reassuring, probably Julian Edge’s observations about this issue in the FND Module will have come to your mind. Possibly also Prabhu’s perspective according to which no method would suit all contexts and all learners. “The way ahead for methodology is for teachers to be engaged in an ongoing search for ways and means that seem plausible to them in their own practice.” (FND: 95). In addition we would suggest that teaching children following a fixed series of steps and repeating them over and over again is in contrast with all that we have learned about young learners so far.

At this point it would be useful to remember the distinction between the terms “method” and “approach” as drawn by Anthony (1963). The former is used to describe a fixed sequence of procedures to organize teaching. The latter refers to a set of assumptions and beliefs about the nature of language and language learning from which text-book writers, syllabus designers and teachers can draw principles to guide their practical work. (Note, however, that the term “method” is often used interchangeably with “approach” in the U.S).

Going back to the above question it could be argued that when dealing with children, we could benefit from embracing Brown’s “language pedagogy” (Brown, 2002). In his view, language pedagogy implies that “we can think in terms of a number of possible methodological – or, shall we say, pedagogical-options at our disposal. Viable current approaches to language teaching are principled in that there is perhaps a finite number of general research-based principles on which classroom practice is grounded. A sound, comprehensible approach underlies the creation of a set of learning experiences that are appropriate, given specific contexts and purposes, for realizing established objectives” (Ibid: 12 and following).

Task 2

Here are the key expressions from each of the above quotations:

1. “pedagogical options”
2. “research based principles”
3. “learning experiences”

Written by Rita Balbi with Paula de Nagy
May 2008
Brainstorm the meanings behind each of them. If you can, compare your ideas with a colleague.

Given the shift towards principles away from following a fixed set of steps and towards learning experiences rather than just exercises or activities, you might wonder why we seem concerned with methodologies. The reasons are:

• Published materials for the primary school in the seventies and eighties tended to take a lot from methods designed for adults and their influence can sometimes be traced in more recent materials too even if, generally, they do not make these references explicit. We should, as teachers, be able to identify these.
• In order to make informed choices we need to know what is available and “it is valuable for teachers to be aware of where we have come from as a profession” (Nunan, 1995: 228).
• We know that teaching theories are an abstraction and we can only see how they have been interpreted in text-books by materials writers or in actual lessons by teachers; however, analysing and evaluating them is a way to learn to analyse and evaluate our own practice. (Nunan, 1995).

4.2 The influence of traditional methods on teaching and materials for young learners.

In this section you are invited to reflect on some of the methods that, although designed for adults, have had, and, sometimes still have, an impact on materials and classroom activities for young learners.

Task 3

Read Appendix B and identify
• how each of the methods described has influenced materials and classroom activities for young learners (find examples from text-books or activities you are familiar with)
• the features that enhance learning
• the limitations with reference to young learners.

With reference to the direct method, you may have noticed that the association of language with pictures is very common in children’s text-books and the use of pictures and realia is frequent practice in the YL classroom. The association of speech with visual materials can be exploited as an effective and motivating factor to achieve specific objectives such as vocabulary development and the implicit
teaching of some basic grammar. As a technique, then, it can be useful but I would argue it would be boring if adopted as the only classroom procedure. Besides, a serious limitation of this way of working is that it helps the acquisition of descriptive language but does not help students to learn how to interact with others in everyday situations.

The influence of the audio-visual method in children’s materials can be recognized in the use of pictures as conveyors of meaning and in the adoption of dialogues as a frequent source of input especially in the materials for the 9-12 age group. The value of dialogues depends on the kind of language and interaction model they provide and on the way they are exploited. We would add that memorising whole dialogues, as required by the strict version of the method, does not lead to spontaneous language use! Even if children seem to enjoy some forms of repetition, their attention spans would not cope with the prolonged and monotonous drilling required by the method.

Some of the activities connected with communicative methodology are often found in children’s books and are part of the work done in class. These include such activities as information gap activities, simple forms of role-play, surveys on various topics and problem-solving. These activities often imply pair-work and group-work. The fact that children are often split into pairs or small groups may foster more direct involvement and lower the tension induced from the effort of paying constant attention during work in the plenary mode.

Various types of TPR activities and games are frequently practised in the primary classroom. They provide opportunities for listening comprehension, even if, generally, these opportunities are at sentence level as the instructions consist of isolated utterances (example: clap your hands; stand up etc.). In addition they are a positive way for the children to break the usual sitting routine and release energy. It is evident that TPR as a method would be very limiting and even tiring: however TPR activities represent a useful resource particularly suitable for children and certainly compatible with other approaches. Vale (1995: 39) observes that “children often link a physical response with the spoken word when they are acquiring their first language. Within language teaching, this type of teaching and learning has taken the title of TPR.”

If you are further interested in exploring how techniques from various sources could be exploited in teaching children and the contribution they could give to language learning, see Vale, 1995: 179 – 181.

Keeping in mind the key concepts of “pedagogical options”, “research based principles” and “learning experiences” we will examine some approaches widely advocated as being more suitable for teaching young learners.
4.3 Content-based approaches and young learners

4.3.1 General characteristics

In this section we will consider approaches to L2 and FL teaching which derive from a common principle: in the L1 acquisition situation there’s just one fundamental type of activity consisting of either receptive or productive use of language in a real context for real purposes; similarly also the L2 learning situation should provide opportunities for using the target language as a means to comprehend and express real meanings and not just be an end in itself. Learners should perceive it as an additional way to communicate and not just as something to manipulate during language lessons as the main focus is on relevant meaning rather than on structures. The underlying concept is that language skills are enhanced more effectively when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than form and through language use rather than through direct language tuition. In other words “use to learn” rather than “learn now to use later”. As Halliwell (1995: 131) emphasizes “one very powerful way we get hold of a language is by receiving and producing real messages.” Other common features of these approaches are that:

- the terms defining them can be used to refer to both approach and course design as they are characterised by a strong and coherent link between the content of the teaching and the way it is delivered
- it is difficult to draw a clear-cut distinction between some of them as there is a lot of overlapping in the suggested classroom activities and sometimes different labels are used to describe very similar, if not identical, ways of teaching.

4.3.2 Topic-based approach

This approach is based on the assumption that language should be integrated into the wider learning context that children experience. In fact it is common practice in primary schools in many countries to teach different aspects of the curriculum in an integrated way, without making a separation into subject areas. Moon (2005: 118) defines topic work as “a way of organising children’s learning and language learning around topics or themes of interest to the children”. Cameron argues that “teaching that is integrated around a theme is claimed to better suit the way young children naturally learn” (Cameron 2001: 181). The implementation of the topic-based approach in the FL classroom implies that the teacher tries to base lessons on a topic or theme e.g. animals, and “children will have the opportunities to learn the foreign language through its use to carry the thematic content” (Ibid: 182). The language the children are exposed to derives from the topic and not by a previously fixed list of language items. For example: in dealing with animals, to use one of
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Teaching Young Learner Unit 4

the most popular topics in primary classrooms, there is a high potential for naturally eliciting the use of simple present, ways to express location, size, ability etc. It is easier to generate motivation and enthusiasm in children for talking about their pet than, for instance, learning ‘have got’ devoid of a context. “The language learning opportunities offered by theme-based teaching in the foreign language classroom arise from the content and the activities that pupils undertake. Together, the content and the activities produce language-using situations and discourse types.” (Ibid: 184.)

The adoption of the topic-based approach poses different challenges to teachers in relation to their background. A specialist English teacher might have no experience on how to deal with topics in a way children can take them while the non-native classroom teacher might lack the language competence to deal with topics.

Task 4

Part 1

Read the following short extract from Cameron, 2001, page 184

Theme based teaching can be used in large or small amounts, and in varying concentrations. In concentrated form, and in skilled hands, it could replace course book and syllabus altogether. More realistically, it can be adopted for one or two lessons in a week, or for several weeks in a term, to supplement other work, and to help teachers build up the skills and knowledge that are demanded. Even when the course book is used fairly closely, theme based ideas can provide extra activities.

Questions for reflection:

- If you have ever experienced topic/theme based teaching in working with young learners, which of the attitudes described above have you adopted? Give reasons.

- If you have no experience of topic-based teaching and would like to introduce it in your teaching, which of the attitudes described above, would you adopt? Give reasons.

Discuss your ideas with a colleague or send a message to the discussion list

Part 2
Appendix C presents two sets of materials for teaching young learners. Analyse them and answer the following:

- Would you define them as topic-based? Give reasons
- What is the relationship between topic and language in the two materials?
- What kind of language input does each of them provide?
- What kind of language output are the learners expected to produce in each of the materials?
- What is the potential of the materials for implementing the following statements from Cameron, 2001:192.
  “Teaching content through the foreign language offers more opportunities for incidental vocabulary learning than teaching the foreign language as a subject”.
  “A real benefit of theme based learning is that it offers a natural use for a wider range of discourse types, both spoken and written, than is usually found in a course book. Themes can include different aspects of the same topic that each requires different types of discourse… using and producing informational discourse, the discourse of scientific reports, recipes and a range of spoken language across the different activities.”

You will certainly have noticed that C1 uses the topic of the park as a framework to expose the children to the present continuous while C2 has the topic of trees as its focus. In C1 the language input and the expected output are generally controlled and limited to the structure to be learnt. The language is associated to pictures but the same pictures could be used to illustrate other tenses. A more meaningful production by the children is that required in the assessment phase. The listening activities of C1 are supported by a written version of the same text, while in C2 the children are asked to listen for gist in the natural flow of the lesson (There are no specific listening activities). In C2 the children are exposed to more varied input (present simple of various verbs, simple past, adjectives, ways to express location, ways to express preference). The expected output implies that they choose what to say and how to say it. In C1 there are no opportunities of “incidental vocabulary learning” while in C2 the children can learn vocabulary from each other (see the brainstorming activity as an example). The discourse type of C1 is the pedagogical one typical of a language learning manual. In C2 the children are confronted with listening to facts about trees, reporting their observations, writing their observations, interviewing, story telling. A risk of C2 might be that there is too much input and not enough opportunities to revisit it. The teacher should be careful at recycling the learning points s/he wants to focus on in particular (how to describe? Usage of simple present? How to compare? How to express size? How to express location? How to tell past events? How to ask...
questions?). Besides, throughout the lesson the teacher should help the children to understand what s/he says and to clarify what they mean through questions, rewording their output and expanding it.

For a detailed discussion of the rationale behind topic-based teaching, and a set of examples read Cameron 2001, Chapter 8 and make a note of the things which are new for you.

For practical ideas about how to organise topic-based teaching read Moon (2005) Chapter 9. You will also notice that this author does not make a distinction between theme-based teaching and cross-curricular teaching.

4.3.3 Cross-curricular approach

While topic-based teaching is a way of organising a series of lessons around a theme, a cross-curricular approach is a wider concept, which could be said to include topic-based teaching. Halliwell (1997:3-4) distinguishes between “integrated skills work” which is topic-based learning as described above and “integrating EFL into other discrete subjects”, namely cross-curricular work as described by Vale (1990 and 1995). (Notice that Vale uses the terms “cross-curricular” and “activity-based” interchangeably). In many materials and contexts, there may not be a very clear distinction between the two with much cross-fertilisation of tasks and activities leading to a blurring of the boundaries. For example, project work, which is a popular means of organising the learning in a YL classroom, in many instances combines features of both of these approaches (See Leigh 1989; Gorlato 1994; Trégret & Raymond-Barker 1991 for examples).

Halliwell (1992: 131) points out that “if you compare the work you do in language lessons and the work you do in other lessons, you will find that however different the content of the lesson, in certain respects they build on the same processes. In particular, those processes are: diagrammatic representation of information; repeated pattern; understanding through seeing; responding by doing. It is these key elements in common between the subjects which will help us to integrate language work and other learning even with learners in the early stages.”

Vale (1990 and 1995) points out that this approach seems to conflict with traditional FL methodology which was generally designed to teach motivated adults and passionately insists that young learners’ needs come before any other consideration. Children learn language holistically as part of a whole learning experience. While other experts consider this approach rather challenging and demanding for the teacher, he links it to a teaching pathway giving teachers
supportive guidelines and the confidence deriving from routines; it starts with input and active listening comprehension, develops with hands-on experience and has a final part in which the teacher uses the experience gained by the children in the two previous phases to foster their speaking skill. For an example see Appendix D.

### Task 5

Analyse the following activities from Chamot et al (2001:62) “Accelerating English Language learning” page 62 and say if you would define them as topic-based or cross-curricular

**How many are there now?**

There were seven birds in the grass. Three flew away. How many are in the grass now?

There were nine fish in the tank. Six fish were sold. How many are in the tank now?

There were five bees on a leaf. One flew away. How many are on the leaf now?

There were three armadillos by the road. One ran away. How many are by the road now?

**Write About it**

Make up a problem about animals. End your problem with this question: How many are there now?

At this point you may be interested in knowing that the authors of the materials in Task 5 call their approach “Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach” (CALLA) and describe it as follows: “Content subjects are the primary focus of instruction in CALLA. Content, rather than language drives the curriculum. Language modalities (e.g. listening, speaking, reading and writing) are developed for content-area activities as they are needed, rather than being taught sequentially. Academic language skills can be developed as the need for them emerges from content. Language skills will be most meaningful when students perceive that they
are needed in order to accomplish a communicative or academic task.” (Chamot et al., 2001: XVI). In the above quotation, the term “academic language skills”, refers to the appropriate language skills needed to function effectively in the school context as Chamot’s course was designed for ESOL learners attending school in the U.S.

As you may observe, CALLA is a term new to ELT but whose content fits perfectly with Halliwell’s definition of “Cross-curricular”. When using a cross-curricular approach, teachers of different subjects tend to co-ordinate their efforts across the curriculum, thus giving the learners a more cohesive learning experience. Halliwell (1995: 133) suggests that we can:
- “use work from language classes as the basis for work in other lessons;
- take techniques which the children are learning in other subjects and use them to promote language work;
- use topics from other subjects in language lessons;
- teach other subjects wholly in the target language.”

In some contexts, the English teacher might have responsibility for teaching other subjects too. This has been particularly successful in immersion language learning programmes where the classroom teacher uses either just the foreign language or both the mother-tongue and the foreign language interchangeably during the day to teach the normal school curriculum (see Brewster et. al. 1992; Curtain & Pesola 1994:197-215).

Advantages of a cross-curricular approach include:
- the content of the language classroom mirrors the child’s other learning experiences;
- it allows for the reinforcement of key developmental areas such as numeracy and literacy;
- by linking the language learning experience to other areas of the curriculum children are encouraged to perceive learning as a cohesive and integrated experience;
- it develops students’ ability to learn to learn, etc.

Task 6

Both the theme-based approach and the cross-curricular approach draw from the ordinary learning experience children have at school. In your opinion, should the L2 teacher deal with topics already known to the children or new ones?

Give reasons based on your experience, if possible.
You may be interested in knowing that, according to Cameron (2001), children should not find themselves studying the same topic over again with different teachers. Personally I (Rita) would agree with her but I have met many teachers who would maintain a different perspective on the basis that dealing in L2 with something already familiar would facilitate comprehension.

If you are interested in a thorough discussion of the rationale behind cross-curricular teaching, and a set of examples read Halliwell, 1992, Chapter 6.

4.3.4 Activity-based approach

Many YL teachers, with whom I (Rita) have been in touch, would describe their way of teaching as “activity-based” and this is probably the most popular label for children’s materials. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with “topic-based” or “cross – curricular” because both the former and the latter imply a variety of different activities. (Vale 1995). In other cases, topics or activities are used to organise lessons or units, although they may be just an external covering for grammatical or functional sequencing. In other words, activities may be a motivating and lively way to teach a strictly linguistic syllabus and integrate phases of direct language teaching with phases of actual language use. This has the advantage of supplementing classical teaching with some phases of more authentic language work without completely dismantling the view of teaching with which so many teachers still feel more at ease. It may also be a way to start trying something in the direction of more natural and personal expression and with fewer elements of predictability.

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| Look at a unit from an EFL text-book for young learners advertised as “activity-based”.
  - Are the activities language-focussed or content-focussed?
  - What is the role of the activities?
  - Are the activities consistent with the objectives?
  - On the basis of your experience with children, do you think they would enjoy them?

Give reasons for your answers |

A risk to avoid is that of engaging learners in activities which may be creative, interesting and fun but do not accomplish the expected goals. “We must, at all cost, avoid giving the impression that activities are collected that pass the time, but have no underlying organisation.” (Ytreberg, 1997: 27).
Teachers, particularly those who are new to YL teaching, may inadvertently set activities up in such a way that the fun element completely overshadows the learning element – some children may thus become so excited that they are unable to control their enthusiasm and natural energy and boisterousness. Alternatively, if activities take too long or don’t challenge learners enough, children may become restless and unco-operative. Halliwell (1992: 20) establishes two different ways of looking at activities:

“You will find that some language activities stir a class. In a positive sense, ‘stir’ means that the activities wake them up, stimulate them. In a negative sense, it may be that the activities over-excite them or allow them to become unconstructively restless. There are other activities which have the opposite effect. They seem to settle the children. To put it positively, that means they will calm a class down. The negative side of this is to say that some activities will bore the class into inertia. (ibid: 20)

This dichotomy between stir and settle activities is a fundamental issue in the YL classroom. Children can often be extremely co-operative and well-behaved in the classroom but this cannot be assumed to be a given. Their behaviour will often reflect their feelings towards learning and the activity itself. Using stir and settle activities as a guideline can help teachers to design lessons which cater for individual learners and which harness different sides of a learner’s personality. As teachers know, not all children will want to play all the time. Learners’ self-esteem will be highest, (as you have seen in your reading of Williams & Burden, 1997), when they succeed and feel that their contributions are being noted and appreciated. Lessons which cater for both the need to work quietly and the need to be energetic will appeal to a wide range of learners.

Another important dichotomy in the classification of activities pointed out by Halliwell (1992: 22 and 23) is the one between those which “engage children’s minds” and those “which keep them physically occupied”. With reference to the previous statement it could be argued that it is almost impossible to ascribe an activity totally to one or the other group as generally there is a higher or lower emphasis towards one of the two. However, as examples of the former Halliwell lists “games, puzzles, competitions, imagining, talking about themselves” and as examples of the latter “reading aloud, copying, drawing, repetition”. Her conclusion is that in order to increase children’s involvement and learning opportunities, activities should combine mental and physical engagement and the teacher should be sensitive to the learners’ moods and consequently decide about the appropriate doses of each of the four elements just considered.

4.3.5 Task-based approach

Written by Rita Balbi with Paula de Nagy
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Task-based learning (TBL) is extensively dealt with in the MET module and therefore some of you will already be familiar with it. J. Willis in the introduction to her book on Task-Based Learning (1996:1) says that “The aim of communication tasks is to stimulate real communication in the target language... The aim of the task is to create a real purpose for language use and provide a natural context for language study.” Target language here refers to English as a whole rather than a particular language item, for example, a tense. She then says that there are three key conditions for an effective learning environment and they are “exposure to a rich but comprehensible input of real spoken and written language in use”, “use of the language to do things (i.e. exchange meanings); motivation to listen and read the language and to speak and write it (i.e. to process and use the exposure)” (ibid: 11). She rejects labelling activities with no linguistic outcome as task, highlighting the importance of a non-linguistic outcome, as a defined feature. She continues by making a distinction between labelling any activity as task and activities with an outcome to be reached through using language and shows how the latter have a high potential for implementing the three above conditions.

As with the approaches considered above, task based learning gives priority to meaning rather than form and Willis highlights that “an important feature of TBL is that learners are free to choose whatever language forms they wish to convey what they mean, in order to fulfil, as well as they can, the task goals.”(ibid: 24). Another advantage of TBL is that tasks provide the variety of input and range of learning opportunities favoured by Gardner’s Multiple-Intelligences theory (Gardner, 1999).

In Appendix E you will find an extract on using Task-Based Learning (TBL) with YLs from Willis (1996:127-130). It provides a variety of reasons why this is an appropriate approach for YLs as well as a fairly extensive list of types of task.

### Task 8

With reference to the extract from Willis (Appendix E)
- consider how appropriate a TBL approach might be for your context
- identify the activities listed which you have already used and say why you have chosen to include them in your teaching.
- What advantages are there in such activities? Are there any disadvantages?

Cameron (2001) dedicates a whole chapter to learning languages through tasks and describes the essential features and stages of classroom tasks insisting that not all
the activities that take place in a classroom can be defined as tasks. For an activity to be considered a task it should comply with the following: coherence for learners, meaning and purpose for learners; active involvement of learners; clear language learning goals; a structured procedure with a clear beginning and end.

Williams and Burden (1997: 167) differ from Cameron in their definition of task and give this term a general meaning: "basically, a task is anything that learners are given to do (or choose to do) in the language classroom to further the process of language learning.” However they also indicate that recently “the term task has taken on a particular meaning, as increasing attention has been focused on what has become known as a task-based approach to foreign and second language teaching” (ibid: 168). Within this perspective they report that research evidence suggests that “individuals acquire a foreign language through the process of interacting, negotiating and conveying meanings in the language in purposeful situations”. A task is seen as “a forum” in which this takes place (ibid: 168). They then make examples of how some tasks from Feuerstein’s Instrumental Enrichment Programme can be used to teach both language and thinking skills.

**Task 9**

Look at Williams and Burden, 1997: 180 – 185 and analyse the suggested tasks. Identify one that you would consider useful (and feasible) for one of your classes. Give reasons.

You have probably noticed that these tasks have a very high cognitive load and although they were originally designed to develop children’s skills, they may be very demanding when adapted to the L2 situation and for sure they are not suitable for children younger than nine or ten and probably only academically gifted children would enjoy them.

We would suggest that this is the appropriate time for you to read two of the core readings for this module which are, Cameron (2001), Chapter 2 and Williams and Burden (1997), Chapter 8.

If you are interested in the results of research based on task-based learning in primary classrooms, read Carless (2002) and Dufficy (2004). Both provide deep, although differing, insights on the outcome of task-based instruction in two different contexts. Pinter (1999) is a wide-ranging report on the strategies used by children doing tasks in an EFL context. Pinter (2006, chapter 5) discusses the demands of tasks with different degrees of difficulty. Mackey, Kanganas, Oliver (2007) deal with the differences in children’s response to familiar and unfamiliar
tasks. If you are curious about a critical view of the adoption of TBL with children, read Rosa, 2004.

4.3.6 Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL refers to the teaching of a school subject in a language which is not the children’s native language or the language normally used in instruction. It is a meaning-focused learning method where language knowledge is not the ultimate aim but rather a vehicle for instruction. The focus lies on doing something with language, namely learn subject matter and, indirectly, develop language. For this reason CLIL is sometimes referred to as “dual focussed education” (Marsh, undated: 6). This approach, with strong methodological similarities to immersion programmes, but taking a much smaller portion of the total curriculum time, has recently attracted the interest of EFL teachers. Its supporters (See Marsh, 2002) argue that it is a better and more challenging language learning environment than traditional language classes as it can offer a natural situation for language development which builds on other forms of learning. Van de Craen (undated) maintains that language competence develops rapidly in CLIL environments as CLIL classes offer plenty of opportunities for practice of different discourse types and for implicit language instruction through the teacher’s scaffolding intervention. Maljers and Marsh (undated) suggest that forms of CLIL are an alternative way of language learning support “pedagogically and financially viable” and built “on the foundations of relevance and authenticity” (Ibid: 3 and 4). They look at authenticity as being linguistically prepared for the opportunities of an increasingly border-free world, and in terms of good language learning practice. Graddol, as reported by Nimkannon (2006) would envisage an early introduction of short periods of CLIL instruction starting from the first year of primary school as a springboard for practising the language, rather than doing it only in English classes. Similarly Marsh speaks of 30 minutes of “language showers” (Marsh, undated: 6).

Another distinctive feature of CLIL is its impact on the way children think as being able to think about something in different languages can enrich their understanding of concepts and broaden their conceptual maps. (Marsh, 2002).

Task 10

With reference to CLIL, here are some of the parents’ frequently asked questions.

- Could learning in the additional language hurt the child’s first language?
- Will my child learn the main content as well as if s/he studies only in the first language?
- Will the teacher use only the target language during lessons?
• What if my child is not as good at languages as the other children in the classroom?

Try to think how you would respond and compare your answers with those by Marsh in Appendix F.

• Are there any points with which you disagree?
• Is the possible disagreement rooted in your opinions or on evidence from direct and indirect experience?

I (Rita) would consider “hurt” too strong an expression but I would be a bit cautious about teaching a whole course with CLIL and would rather favour some CLIL modules as I have noticed that some Italian children attending an international school sometimes lack the specific vocabulary of school subjects in Italian. At the same time, when working with CLIL, I would try to restrict the use of L1 as much as possible, because, in my opinion, there is no point in doing CLIL if L1 is used.

The adoption of CLIL at secondary school level implies more complex issues than at primary level about who should be the deliverer (subject specialist or target language specialist?) and the role of the specialist FL teacher. This would not be the case in the primary as generally primary teachers teach all subjects and those who teach just English often have a background as general teachers. However, with reference to young learners, an open question would be the feasibility and appropriateness of a CLIL approach in private language courses.

For a short and essential description of the principles underlying CLIL, read Marsh “Using languages to learn and learning to use languages; an introduction to CLIL” or Darn “Content Language Integrated Learning”. If you want to explore this issue further, you could read Marsh, 2002. For practical advice about CLIL materials, read Lucietto 2006.

As conclusion to this section, Task 11 will help you to identify the elements of convergence and divergence between your teaching and the teaching methods and approaches described so far.

**Task 11**

The unit so far has dealt with a description of the traditional methods that are sometimes used to teach YLs and a description of the approaches that seem to be more suitable for this age group.

• From the analysis of the data from your recordings, do you think any of the following labels would be appropriate to describe your teaching? Audio-visual method? Communicative approach? Total Physical Response? Any
• If you think none of the above reflects your way of teaching in a complete and faithful way, can you identify some of their features in your lessons?

Support your answer with evidence from the recordings.

4.4. The impact of direct language tuition on young learners

Exclusive focus on meaning and a concentration on form are two extreme positions often debated in the literature in our field and there has been a lot of research trying to identify an effective course in one or the other direction (Marton 1988; Foley, 1991; Ellis 1996; Nassaji, 2000). Most of this research was conducted on adult learners and has pointed out how learners who “know the rules” and have been exposed mainly to form focussed practice are not equipped to cope effectively with the target language in real life situations. They lack the skills necessary to use language fluently and appropriately outside the classroom where “they will be obliged to improvise” (Willis, D. 2003: 21). Task-based learning with its opportunities of meaningful language use and language awareness raising activities has been suggested as the tuition modality with the highest potential for bridging the gap between the classroom and independent use in the other contexts. (Long. 1983; Nunan, 1989; Wachs, 1994; Willis J. 1996; Willis J. and Willis D., 1996, Willis D. 2003). Jane and Dave Willis and David Nunan consider appropriate ways of making meaning centered language instruction as a desirable component of task-based learning for teenagers and adults. But what about children? As Mackey and Silver (2005: 243) state, “SLA research findings should not be generalized from adult learners to children without adequate empirical evidence” but, as lamented by Rixon (1999), even now there is not enough published research available on important areas of young learners’ SLA. Similarly Cameron (2001: 242, 243) points out that “research in the field is beginning, but much more is required in order to make syllabuses and teaching effective.” An example of an interesting research area would be the exploration of the reasons of the contrast between the literature providing appreciative statements about content-based approaches and their limited implementation in the classroom.

It is also interesting to notice that although most YL textbooks are advertised as content or activity based, they have sections dedicated to explicit language teaching, even if often presented in playful and attractive ways. Recently there has been also a production of grammars for children. These facts raise questions about the relationship between content – based teaching and explicit language instruction. Does the former, by itself, enable learners to reach the desired competence in the target language? Under what conditions? Or does it need to be preceded, followed or integrated by direct tuition? And, if it does, why and how?
We will try to reflect on this issue, starting with a task based on your experience and then referring to the literature and identifying some guidelines that, however, may not be valid for all contexts.

**Task 12**

Go back to your recordings and see if in your lessons you can identify

- phases of explicit language teaching (Awareness raising activities? Corrective feedback? Clarification of puzzling points? Information about rules?)
- phases of “deliberate practice of words or grammatical patterns” (Pinter, 2006:85). If there are, is it to practise new language in a controlled way or as remedial work when you noticed mistakes? If there are, how did children respond to these phases?

Answer the following questions:

- According to your experience, to which extent, is direct language teaching beneficial to YLs?
- Direct language tuition delivered before content-based activities and awareness raising activities as part of corrective feedback are two different ways of explicit language teaching. Which is more appropriate for young learners?

Give reasons for your choices.

If possible, read Lightbown and Spada, Chapter 6 and find out similarities and differences with your experience with children.

With reference to the last question in Task 12, explicit language tuition delivered before content-based activities is an option with great similarities to the PPP procedure and may lead to all its disadvantages; in addition it would put children off as they simply might not follow the meaning of what the teacher says with the imaginable result of a waste of the time resource; in this way time would be spent in doing something perceived as boring, too difficult and consequently useless and demotivating. On the contrary, attracting the attention of older children on one or two (no more at one time) features of English that they seem not to grasp, may help at least those that are capable of reflecting on the language. Ideally this should be done on an individual basis as different children surely are at different stages of their language development and need to focus on different aspects of the language.
Let us now look at the literature. As mentioned in the previous page, the literature on children’s language learning dedicates lots of pages to show the advantages of content-based language use and very few words to the issue of language awareness raising activities or other forms of direct tuition. This is what it was possible to find:

- Cameron (2001) makes a distinction between children under 8 or 9 for whom explicit teaching would not be conceptually appropriate and older children that are increasingly able to learn from form-focusing techniques provided this is done in a way that doesn’t destroy motivation and elicits their active participation.

- On a similar wavelength, Ytreberg (1997: 27) maintains that “very young children are perfectly able to absorb the target language through play and other activities which they find useful and enjoyable. At later stages, however more systematic work may be useful, but only in so far as it clarifies and makes understandable language which the pupils have experienced in oral production.”

- Moon (2005:10) just mentions helping children “notice the underlying pattern in language” as one of the conditions supporting language learning.

- According to Pinter (2006: 84 - 85) “teaching grammar in isolation, for its own sake, can be a dry and boring activity. It is better if grammar is noticed and learnt from meaning-focused input… Children need to be able to see the relationship between form and function.” However she does not underestimate the value of controlled practice for YLs as an opportunity “to reproduce patterns and vocabulary in a controlled way before expressing their own meanings more freely.”

- Lightbown and Spada (2006) report about various research projects, including some involving children, that would show the need of finding a balance between content-based work and guided, form focused instruction and corrective feedback.

As a contribution to this discussion I would like to share with you a research project I (Rita) carried out from 1994 to 1998. I coordinated a group of seven primary teachers who had accepted to meet regularly to design topic-based materials to try in one of their classes. The teachers were given specific language support to run the activities in English and were asked to use English as the social language and to give instructions during their lessons. They had to do without any direct or explicit language tuition. The only exception allowed was where children would ask a question. (It was envisaged that these questions would be in L1 and, in this case, L1 was accepted in the answer). The children were eight-year-old beginners and their exposure time was three fifty minute lessons per week. The topics considered were: “myself” and “animals” in the first year; “Food and drinks” and “the town” in the second year; “story-telling and… writing” in the third year. The original project was to compare the children’s performance after
three years with that of a control group taught with a form-focussed text-book, but, for various reasons, unfortunately we did not have a control group. Most of the children belonging to the project performed satisfactorily in a listening test and in two open-ended tasks done in pairs at the end of each year. In the final year, each class produced a “book” with an illustrated story and the seven classes got copies of all the stories. According to the teachers’ reports, both the children’s motivation and their own was very high. The materials were presented at a teachers’ workshop held at the end of the project and many of the participants asked for copies but I don’t know if they ever had a chance to use them. The original group of teachers continued to use the materials for some years and, later, some designed new ones based on the same principles.

By now you may have guessed that I tend to consider meaningful and purposeful language use as more effective with YLs than other forms of language work. However I cannot deny that young learners, except the very young ones, also go through phases in which they feel the need to get to grips with the system of the target language. In this case we have to respond to this “cry”; learners feel reassured if they get an answer to their questions. The challenge is that not all learners in a class experience this need at the same time and in the same ways. In private language courses this difficulty might be very frequent as the participants include children of different ages and, consequently different levels of cognitive development. Here is an example of how an eight-year old Italian child worked on a pattern he had observed. One day he asked his English teacher (in Italian) whether it was true that in English nouns need an “s” for plural. The teacher confirmed his supposition. However at this point he asked whether the plural of “mouse” was pronounced “mauss”. The teacher explained it was an exception and it was “mice”. But the plural of “foot” is “foots”, he insisted. The teacher said this is another exception. The child’s conclusion was: L’inglese è una lingua terribile! (English is a terrible language). And here is an example from Spain. A ten-year-old child whose teacher used to invite the class to move to the English room saying: “let’s go to the English room” said to her teacher in Spanish: “I understand go, I understand English, I understand room, but could you tell me what let’s is?”

Children’s questions sometimes derive from noticing that their frequent initial hypothesis of a word by word correspondence between L1 and L2 is not confirmed by their L2 experience. Here is an example of a frequently asked question by Italian children: Why do we have “tu” and “voi” and in English there is just “you”? (“tu” is used to address one person and “voi” to address more than one person). Some German children addressed their teacher using “they” which is the literal translation of the German courtesy form “Sie” and when the teacher corrected them rephrasing their utterances, they asked why.

My conclusion to this discussion is that YLs should be exposed to new language in meaningful contexts and be given opportunities to practise it freely and

Written by Rita Balbi with Paula de Nagy
May 2008
spontaneously. When feedback from the class suggests that it would be useful to focus on specific language items, this could be done through awareness raising activities and / or focused practice. Focused practice should not be mechanical drilling but opportunities to use a specific word or pattern with reference to a context. Contexts help memory and the connection between grammar and meaning and not just form. One or two controlled, but however meaningful activities can help only in the early phases of learning when the construction of forms is at stake. In fact the problem with English is not so much how to make the plural of nouns, but which nouns take a plural form and not how to make the simple past but when to use it. (In the latter example, some controlled practice might be useful just for the learning of the pronunciation of the regular forms). Pictures, stories and classroom life could be useful contexts to practise and recycle specific language items and patterns, provided this reinforcement work takes no longer than five or eight minutes in a lesson, is spread over time and is inserted as naturally as possible in the flow of the discourse of each lesson. In fact from SLA research we know that the automatic use of appropriate forms takes time.

Starting from an analysis of the impact of traditional methods and approaches on teaching children, the unit so far has considered advantages and drawbacks of various ways to teach YLs English and the relationship between content-based approaches and direct language teaching. In the following section we move to deal with the role of the environment in affecting learning.

4.5 The role of the environment in motivating and supporting children’s learning

The obviously necessary concern for doing “the right thing” from the linguistic point of view should not overshadow the importance of children’s social and emotional welfare. The focus on affective factors introduced into language learning by various humanistic approaches can provide significant insights on how to deal with young learners, without necessarily having to stick to the methodological procedures envisaged by those approaches. It goes without saying that children who are emotionally well adjusted have a greater chance of early school success, while children with serious emotional difficulty are at serious risk of facing problems at school. Research on early schooling suggests that there is a relationship between positive social behaviour and school success and chances to be accepted by teacher and peers.(Mc Clellan & Kinsey, 199) The risk is to start a cycle where failure generates frustration and exclusion which, in turn, generate further antisocial behaviour and so on. As language teachers we have to realistically accept that serious cases may need treatment we are not supposed and equipped to provide. However we should do whatever we can to create an environment where learning is facilitated because children really enjoy the language classroom and feel at ease with teacher and peers.
Williams and Burden (1997: 202) articulate their views on the impact of the context on learning a language, as follows: “The impact of the context on learning a language is considerable, both at the macro level of the culture in which the learning takes place or the educational system, and at the narrower level of the school or classroom ethos. By giving time and thought to providing learners with an environment that enhances motivation, and that considers learners’ emotional, psychological and sociological preferences, teachers can greatly enhance the learning of a language. It is also clear that whether classrooms are organised according to individualised competitive or co-operative principles will also have a substantial impact on the learning that occurs”. It is clear that even if teachers, at least in some countries, may be in the position of affecting the macro context, in all countries, they have an immense influence on “the classroom ethos” and this is the aspect of the instructional world that they really have the power to modify.

**Task 13**

Answer the following:

- In your opinion and according to your experience what features of the classroom environment are conducive to a favourable learning environment?

- Are there any differences between classes of young learners of different age groups? Which affective strategies would work with different ages?

- What is the impact of different cultures on the learners’ perception of the factors that would create a positive classroom atmosphere?

- Make a list of teacher’s attitudes and strategies conducive to a favourable learning environment and compare it with Appendix G.

With reference to different age groups, an exclusively playful approach is essential with very young learners as playing is the normal activity for that age and the FL time should not be different; especially at the beginning, the FL periods should be very short (and ideally very frequent) so that the children are not put under pressure and get tired. On the other side, frequency of exposure supports memory.

A pleasant atmosphere is important for any age. Older children also need to have fun and enjoy the lesson but this does not mean that we should underestimate their learning potential. Older children need to be challenged in appropriate ways and perceive the language class is worthwhile, because they do interesting things in a pleasant way and make progress. Working just with colours and numbers and the names of some animals for a whole year is not enough for ten year-olds! If learners (especially the older group) have the perception that there is nothing new to learn and the lesson is always the usual stuff will lose interest with the risk of
an early dislike of language learning and an early plateau syndrome. Older learners like being considered for what they are and therefore they get bored and switch off if the visual aids and activities are too childish and repetitive. Older children benefit from having opportunities to have a say and choose and some enjoy experiencing some independence. In some contexts the ten/twelve age group shares the attitudes of teenagers rather than children!

Here is a list of readings on this issue: Moon (2005) Chapter 4; this text provides also a series of tasks for developing the teachers’ reflective skills and practical ideas for the classroom; Halliwell (1992), Chapter 3 also offers good food for thought and shows the relationship between theories and what might happen in the classroom. Williams and Burden, Chapter 9 deals with this topic in general and you might take notes of what, in your opinion, would apply to young learners. In the final part of Chapter 8 (8.4: 185-187) they consider tasks in an educational perspective. I would suggest that what they say about tasks could be extended to whatever we do in the classroom and would help us to analyse the atmosphere we create. “The ways in which teachers mediate in their presentation of tasks is a crucial aspect of any debate on learning tasks. Teachers may have access to innovative activities, but present them in a way that fails to generate feelings of confidence, competence, control, individuality, or the other aspects of mediation.” They also argue that the way learners deal with tasks provides information on their emotional and cognitive responses and can help teachers to identify “which cognitive aspects need developing and what forms of mediation are required” to proceed in future learning activities.

4.6. Looking ahead

This unit has shown various ways of enhancing language acquisition/learning with young learners and you have been asked to reflect on them and to analyse your practice in order to understand the principles behind it. May be the analysis of the recording has revealed to you that what you do in class is coherent with your statements about teaching and learning or that there is a gap between the two.

It is now time for you to try to make your renewed personal pedagogical choices with reference to a specific class you are teaching and justify them with reference to the approaches described so far and to what the reflection on the data from your recordings suggests.

- Would your orientation be in favour of an approach with a focus on learning the forms of the target language in a systematic way?
- Would your orientation be in favour of one of the options in the area of content based approaches? If this is the case, would you envisage the adoption of a strong or weak version? In other words do you think that content focussed language teaching by itself has the potential of ensuring...
adequate language learning or should it be integrated with other forms of language tuition?

As you know, there is a great need of serious research in the areas covered by this unit. What about

- Identifying a teaching approach from those described that you think has the potential of remedying one of the aspects of your teaching that you are not happy about (with reference to the lessons you recorded), trying it out and seeing how it works?
- Trying out how one of the approaches described in the unit would contribute to the achievement of one of the aims of your course?
- Analysing the activities from your recorded lessons or from a unit from a textbook according to the four aspects highlighted by Haliwell (1992:22-23)?
- Studying how the phonology of the first language affects the children’s L2/FL acquisition? (Do your learners pick up pronunciation as quickly and accurately as children are supposed to do?)
- Experimenting ways of “discussing” meaning focused grammar with young learners?
- Identifying one of the features of “learning experiences” (Brown 2002) as opposed to just ordinary lessons and implementing it with a class to see if it makes a difference?
- Researching if content – based teaching should use known or unknown content
- Any other ideas?

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**Appendix A**

The need to communicate in English is immediate and from the first lesson activities should take place in English. Lessons can be run using only English with the aid of mime, facial expression and puppets (Adapted from Dunn, 1983:44).

For many children, meeting a language item once or twice is not sufficient for use: They need further opportunities to consolidate before they can use it. Consolidation may be in many forms- for example, games, a copying activity, repetition of a rhyme or repeating an activity (Dunn, 1983: 54).

Children learning to read a foreign language will be greatly helped if they can hear the words while they are looking at the book. (Bautz, 1988: 41).

Reading is an important and often neglected skill in foreign language learning. Pupils who read a lot will learn the language more quickly (Bautz, 1988: 46).

Instructions must be perfectly clear to all the pupils. This is why it is often useful to give the instructions in the native language, while making it clear that the activity is meant to practise their English, and once they start, they must speak English (Adapted from Bautz, 1988: 56).

What is important with beginners is finding the balance between providing language through controlled and guided activities and at the same time letting them enjoy natural talk (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990: 33).
When the pupils are working with controlled and guided activities, we want them to produce correct language. If they make mistakes at this stage then they should be corrected at once (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990: 33).

Use activities where children are introduced to English vocabulary and sentence structure in the context of stories (Cantoni at TESOL Italy 1992).

Plan concrete activities, such as cooking or singing songs, that have accompanying actions to introduce English in context. (Cantoni at TESOL Italy 1992)

Whereas older children could be expected to follow a clear structural progression and to acquire some basic grammar rules, small children will learn better by mimicking and using language in context (Reilly and Ward, 1997: 13).

Many of the oral activities used in teaching are of a repetitive type, and the children love them. There is both safety and enjoyment in participating in something well-known and thoroughly mastered (Ytreberg, 1997: 33).

The teacher’s main concern when it comes to the choice of language will be to simplify the syntax and to use a vocabulary which is easy without being unnatural. Activities which focus on a certain language point may of course be used, when followed up properly in context, but grammatical terms and teaching grammar as grammar is a waste of time. (Ytreberg, 1997: 33).

Children need to hear the target language again and again (Doron, 2001).

The younger the child, the shorter the attention span... You need to move quickly from one activity to another (Doron, 2001).

Drill the sounds. Be imaginative with your own voice if doing it with young learners. They will remember it better if they have fun (Meldrun, undated).

Most communication for most people most of the time is oral/aural, and this is where the emphasis should be laid from the early stages of learning onwards. Reading and writing should be introduced gradually and with caution in the early stages, building upon language encountered in speaking and listening (Sharpe, 2001: 152).

Provide exposure to varied and meaningful input with a focus on communication. Provide plenty of opportunities to practise and use the language in different contexts (Moon, 2005: 10).
Learning to speak fluently and accurately is one of the greatest challenges for all language learners. This is because to be able to speak fluently, we have to speak and think at the same time. To be able to speak fluently in a foreign language requires a lot of practice: Speaking practice starts with practising and drilling set phrases and repeating models. Speaking practice, however, can also mean communicating with others in situations where spontaneous contributions are required. (Pinter, 2006: 55).

Appendix B

Ideas taken from Balbi Vickery, 1990, Join In, CIDEB pages 66 - 74

The direct method

Theory

Language is primarily spoken, even if it can be represented in written form. In analogy to what happens in first language acquisition, people learn by associating meaning to the target language directly. The target language is learnt by using it and grammar can be learnt inductively.

Syllabus

Vocabulary is emphasized over grammar. Pronunciation receives special attention and phonetic transcription is used as a reminder of correct pronunciation.

Teaching/learning sequence and procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• presents new language associating it with objects, pictures and gesture</td>
<td>• observe, listen and try to figure out meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• elicits students’ production mainly asking questions</td>
<td>• try to respond (sometimes they are invited to ask questions themselves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides further practice especially on vocabulary</td>
<td>• Try to respond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading and writing are seen mainly as reinforcement of what has been introduced and practised orally. The learners’ native language is never used on the ground that L2 learning is in proportion to the exposure.
The audio-visual method

Theory

This method originated as an adaptation of the audio-lingual method. The main difference consists in the introduction of the visual element to convey meaning while there are strong similarities and even coincidence in many aspects if the design. For this reason Rivers (1968) and others deny the existence of an audio-visual method and prefer to speak of visual aids used in combination with audio-visual courses. However present day audio-visual courses have been planned audio-visualy from the beginning.

The linguistic principles on which the method is based are:

- Language is speech, not writing and in the natural sequence of first language acquisition, children first learn to speak and only later (and not in all cultures), to read and write.
- Languages are all different and a language is what its native speakers say.
- The speakers of a language have established a set of habits; this happens by reward or reinforcement.
- Learning a language implies the ability to use it automatically, thanks to the formation of new habits different from those of the first.

Syllabus

The content of the teaching is derived from the description of the forms and vocabulary most used colloquially (as, for instance short forms) and arranged in a graded order from supposedly “easy” to supposedly “difficult”.

Teaching/learning sequence and procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• presents dialogue through pictures and a spoken version (teacher’s voice or tape)</td>
<td>• watch, listen and figure out meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• says dialogue utterance by utterance (pausing after each utterance)</td>
<td>• repeat until they memorize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides practice through drills and gives examples and cues for drills</td>
<td>• act out the dialogue they have memorized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• do the drills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The drills may be conducted by the teacher with or without the help of a tape or done in the language laboratory.

**The communicative approach**

**Theory**

Communicative language teaching recognises the teaching of communicative competence as its aim. Consequently a language course cannot be limited to the teaching of the grammar system and vocabulary but needs to include other dimensions such as ways of expressing the speaker’s aims (generally called “functions”, the role-relationship and the level of formality or informality of the interaction).

**Syllabus**

How to express functions and notions appropriately according to context.
How to negotiate meaning in various circumstances.
When and how to use gestures.
Questions and comments acceptable and unacceptable in the culture.

**Teaching/learning sequence and procedures**

In accordance with the definition of an approach, communicative methodology provides general guidelines and principles about the aim, content and activities of a language course and not a fixed and detailed sequence of steps to be followed. All the four skills are taught, often in an integrated way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• presents new language in a variety of ways (dialogue, picture, reading piece, listening comprehension activity, song etc.)</td>
<td>• respond according to activities suggested by Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides opportunities of practice of communication activities and strategies and acts as facilitator and resource</td>
<td>• do the activities (often involving pair work and group work).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communicative methodology consists of activities that simulate real life tasks; practice takes place in a context and not just at sentence level. Questions and answers are ways of asking for and giving unknown information and not repetition.
of known content just for the sake of practising grammar patterns, in fact the purpose of communication is to bridge the information gap.

**Total Physical Response**

**Theory**

Total Physical Response (TPR) is based on the coordination of language and action. James Asher, the inventor of this method, argued that language directed to young children consists of commands, to which children respond physically before reaching the stage in which they respond verbally. A similar process leads to L2 learning. Also in this case comprehension comes before production and the latter should not be forced.

**Syllabus**

The syllabus consists of basic grammar and vocabulary

**Teaching/learning sequence and procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• presents new language through instructions</td>
<td>• figure out meaning and follow instructions; when they feel ready, they take the teacher’s role and give instructions to their peers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a period of TPR activities conducted also with the support of pictures and realia, learners are exposed to dialogues and other types of texts.

**Appendix C**

**C1**

**See your Module Blackboard**

**C2**
*Meet a tree* from IRRE Liguria 2004 materials for primary teachers.

**See your Module Blackboard**

**Appendix D**

*Written by Rita Balbi with Paula de Nagy*

*May 2008*
Could learning in the additional language hurt the child’s first language?

In CLIL the development of the first language carries the utmost importance. Remember that integrating content and language learning should not mean that the focus on learning another language results in your child’s first language being neglected.

Children will initially mix sounds and words when they are operating with more than one language. As the child learns to master two different languages there will be some degree of interference, which is what happens when element of one language come into use of another. Interference is part of the normal process of language learning and is not a sign of a problem unless it becomes unacceptably recurrent.

Will my child learn the main content as well as if s/he studies only in the first language?

Yes, although the learning process may slow down, particularly at the beginning. There is even the possibility that the learning could be more successful when additional language is used. This may be due to the child having to work harder at decoding in the additional language, the teacher stressing the main language...
points, or other reasons such as high learner motivation resulting from the sense of “fun” which some children experience.

- Will the teacher use only the target language during lessons?

Most CLIL classes involve use of two languages, the majority language and the CLIL language. This is one reason why this CLIL approach is called “integrated” because it includes switching from one language to another when it is in the best interests of learning. Often the main issues are given in the first language and then learning activities carried out in the additional language.

- What if my child is not as good at languages as the other children in the classroom?

All people are different in ability when it comes to language command, regardless of the language. CLIL classrooms always have children with mixed abilities in terms of not only the additional language, but also other forms of knowledge and skill. One key part of CLIL methodology requires that children use language actively with each other during the lessons so that they learn from each other. All children can benefit from CLIL, not just those that we think of as being good at languages.

Appendix G

Here is a list of practical tips, taken from both positive and negative examples collected through classroom observation. Most of these are probably not new to you at all and many of them are relevant to all learners, whatever their age. However, it can be useful just to have a summary to remind ourselves of the issue.

- Establish a personal relationship with each class member and be genuinely sympathetic towards everyone (Example: remember birthdays, special events in the children’s lives; if appropriate in the culture, notice something nice they are wearing, smile, etc.).
- Respect each child and have trust in his/her learning potential. Have high expectations and be cautious about labelling children in a negative way as the children will perceive your attitude even if you do not say anything.
- Develop the learners’ positive self-images and get all children to experience a sense of achievement (acknowledge and show appreciation for the children’s strong points and efforts; praise the children for specific positive action; organize activities giving everyone the opportunity to be successful - this implies grading activities to the individual learners’ skills, designing tasks to suit different levels as open tasks to which some children could
respond with a short basic sentence while others could be more articulate; if you assign homework, be sure it is something the children can do by themselves.

- Get all children to experience a sense of inclusion and ban exclusion from your practice (Example: find a role for everybody in the end of the year show; ask also the naughty ones to collect papers).
- Be fair in implementing the respect of rules and do not tolerate chaos; provide an atmosphere in which the children feel secure and enjoy the lesson.
- Use a firm but gentle tone of voice.
- Use positive language (Example: “move your desks quietly” rather than “don’t make noise when you move your desks” and “listen please” rather than “don’t daydream”).
- Vary activities in order to meet different learning styles and moods and allow different talents to emerge.
- Give learners time to answer questions.
- Remember that L2 acquisition is a long process and give learners time to develop their language skills; deal with learning activities as such (and not as testing) and give learners the support they need during this process. (Example: show them a model sentence; supply a word children need to express their ideas; teach the older ones to use an appropriate dictionary and where to find things in their textbook).
TYL Unit 5

Resources and Activities for Young Learners

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

5.1 Introduction
5.2 Realia
5.3 Materials
  5.3.1 Course books
  5.3.2 Supplementary materials
5.4 Activities
5.5 Writing your own materials
5.6 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Appendix G
Appendix H
Goals

This Unit deals with a description of the resources and activities for teaching young learners and ways of exploiting them to develop language competence.

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the main categories of resources available for the YL ELT classroom
- Analyse and evaluate materials and activities according to a set of criteria coherent with your approach
- Select, adapt and design materials and activities suitable for your context.

Reading

Core reading


Recommended reading

- **Lama, D.** 2006. “Using ICT to support young learners who are non-native speakers of English”. In *Cats Autumn Issue.* IATEFL.
5.1 Introduction

Before starting this unit we need to briefly look first at the concepts respectively implied in the terms “resources” and “activities”. Some of the dictionaries I consulted to find a definition of the former refer to material resources such as oil or economic ones such as money, or to sources of information while the Collins English Dictionary adds a further aspect which is “a supply or source of aid or support”. Of course, especially in the case of TYL, the teacher is probably the most influential resource and I am sure that we all are well aware of our role in fostering motivation and learning. In this Unit, however, I will refer to teachers only in an indirect way and will use “resources” as an umbrella term including the objects and materials that are “deliberately used to increase the learners’ knowledge and/or experience of the language” (Tomlinson, 1998: 2). As for the term “activities”, I will use it in its broadest sense of ‘whatever learners do in the classroom’.

The first part of this Unit deals with resources and distinguishes between materials and “realia” that is real things brought into the classroom and integrated into the lesson. The second part is concerned with various types of activities from the perspective of their impact on learning and, finally, I will consider some suggestions for materials design. If you have taken the CMD module, you have already had opportunities to reflect on the general issues concerning these topics. If this is the
case, you might like to reflect on how what you learnt in CMD is applicable to a YL context.

5.2 Materials

Materials can be carried by a variety of media, of which the most common are print (course books, books, readers, magazines, brochures etc.) or audiocassettes, videotapes, CD ROMs, and internet. In considering materials, I will start with course books, and then move on to deal with supplementary materials. With this term I will refer to all those materials used by teachers “to introduce, reinforce, recycle, integrate or expand the contents of the course book or basic materials when no course-book is used” (Balbi, 1997: 40) or to expose learners to different language experiences. Course books and all the other pedagogic materials “are characterized by simplified language, controlled progression and limited vocabulary.” (Balbi, 1997: 37).

5.2.1 Course books

As far as I know there is hardly any literature discussing the role of course books in teaching young learners (if you come across anything, do let us know) but a reflection on the issues from the general debate can certainly provide some insights with reference to young learners either by analogy or by contrast.

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<td><strong>Part 1</strong></td>
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Here are some general, and sometimes contrasting, views about the role of materials with reference to different aspects of language teaching. Which of them are close to your view about the use of materials with young learners? Give reasons and examples.

- Materials are one of the main variables affecting learning (Stern, 1983).
- Materials are “an important means of satisfying the range of needs that emerge from the classroom and its wider context” (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994: 327).
- Materials and especially course books are “good servants but poor masters” (Cunningsworth, 1984:1).
- The role of materials depends on their “actual use in the classroom” (Nunan, 1995: 211)
- Materials may be used either to remedy the teachers’ deficiencies or as a
starting point for an interaction between teacher, learners and materials (Allwright, 1990).

- “Textbooks can at best provide only a base or a core of material. They are a jumping-off point for teacher and class” (O’Neill, 1982).
- Materials “link teachers and learners to the outside world. They are a means to access not only the target language and possibly its culture(s)... Learners can learn more than language from the materials used in language-learning classes:” (McGrath, 2002: 204 - 205).
- “Materials represent the first stage in which principles are turned into practice” (McGrath, 2002: 219).
- “Materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom... the teacher’s role can become reduced to that of a technician whose primary function is to present materials prepared by others” (Richards and Renandya, 2002: 65-67).

Part 2

Answer the following questions:

- In teaching young learners, do you prefer to use a course book or do without? Give reasons.
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of using a course-book? Consider teacher and learners.
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of working without a course-book? Consider teacher and learners.

Compare your ideas with those in Appendix A

- If your orientation is towards using a course-book, do you feel more at ease with those published for international use or those published for your specific context? Give reasons.

Although course books are the typical resource for learning all subjects in a classroom context and languages are no exception with most teenager and adult learners, the use of course-books is not always taken for granted with young learners.

If you are not yet familiar with materials for young learners, consult the catalogues of the main ELT publishers (you can often do this on-line) to see what they offer and, if possible, visit their local agents to have a look at what is available locally.
(Not all titles are on sale on all markets.) There are also national editions of books by international publishers with some adaptations to suit national contexts and sometimes with a translation of the teacher’s book into L1. In most countries there is also a local production of course books by local authors. As you will know, most course-books are accompanied by other items and consist of 3/5 volumes for the children, each supported by a student’s book and, in some cases, by an audio-cassette or a CD for home use. For the teacher there is a teacher’s book, class cassettes (or CDs, which implies the availability of the suitable technology), a resource pack and, in some cases, a video-tape.

In some contexts, the adoption of a course book is the teacher’s responsibility; in others, teachers have to work with texts chosen by someone else. Even when teachers have been free to decide which book to work with, they often experience feelings of disappointment when, through its use, they discover its weak points or its unsuitability for a specific group of learners. This is confirmed by Tomlinson who writes “one of the things that always amazes me is that, as I travel around the world meeting teachers at workshops or conferences, the impression I am given is that most teachers are dissatisfied with the materials available to them”. (Tomlinson, 1998: 261). This trend implies that, on the one hand, we need effective procedures to analyse and evaluate materials for adoption, on the other we will in any case have to come to terms with the need to adapt and supplement the materials to a greater or lesser extent. An additional difficulty in the evaluation of materials is caused by the fact that, in many cases, only the first volume is available for inspection and so, for instance, it is impossible to consider the language progression through the course.

**Task 2**

Think of a course book you are using or have used with young learners and answer the following:

- What was the procedure that led you to work with it? Were you in a position to have a say in the choice?

Compare your answers with the methods for course book evaluation described in Appendix B and see how close they are to your experience.

Answer the following:

- How is that course an embodiment of your aims, values and approach?

- How does the course meet your expectations and those of the other stakeholders?
• How does the course need to be adapted and integrated? Give examples with a particular unit and class in mind.

In Appendix B there is a reference to lists of criteria to consider when taking decisions about adopting course books. However checklists have their own limitations: if they have the merit of being reminders of some basic things to look at, they also tend to restrict the analysis to the features present in the list, ignoring other aspects.

Task 3

Answer one of the following:

• In your opinion and according to your experience, what are the characteristics of the ideal course book for the 4/6 age-group?

• In your opinion and according to your experience, what are the characteristics of the ideal course book for the 7/9 age-group?

• In your opinion and according to your experience, what are the characteristics of the ideal course book for the 10/12 age-group?

Identify a list of criteria based on your favourite features and compare it with that in Appendix C. Remember that Appendix C does not refer to any age-group in particular and so allow for discrepancies or different perspectives.

It is a common tendency of teachers evaluating materials for potential use to focus their attention on the student’s book and to neglect the teacher’s book and the audio/video - aids accompanying it. Obviously different teachers may have different needs when it comes to teachers’ manuals and Masuhara (1998: 244) distinguishes between inexperienced teachers who “might need more detailed instructions and suggestions” and experienced teachers who might prefer teachers’ guides to supply a lot of different optional activities or interesting raw materials to be exploited.

With reference to the above statement, however, I wish to point out that there is often a fundamental difference between the function of teacher’s books in courses for adults and for children. Generally speaking, it’s possible (though perhaps not always desirable) to use course books for adults without the teacher’s book as the student’s book normally includes all the instructions and texts necessary to work with it. This is not always the case with courses for young learners; the reason is that in many cases, the teacher’s guide is indispensable as it is impossible to work with
the pupil’s book without the instructions and, sometimes, the texts included in the teacher’s manual. This is especially true for courses for the 4/6 age-range which consist mainly or exclusively of pictures and for those for older children relying on a mainly oral approach. Consequently, the teacher’s book becomes an essential component of the course as well as fulfilling the other traditional roles such as clarifying the principles underlying the book and providing pedagogical suggestions for effective teaching with the book.

Similar considerations can be made with regard to the resource packs generally attached to young learners’ courses. They sometimes provide materials essential to develop the core teaching associated with the course and, in other cases, they offer additional opportunities for language activities.

And, for the last point in this section, I would like to draw your attention to the use of audio and video aids accompanying courses. It appears obvious that good quality is a must but even in the case of good quality I am rather sceptical about the value for children of exploiting audio recorded texts in the same way as in adult courses, and as suggested in some YL courses. Children tend to get bored and anxious listening to texts they find difficult to follow and understand while they can follow their teacher, or a text on video, much more easily than just a recorded voice. However, audio-aids are effective in the case of songs, poems, rhymes and stories because a professional recording could, generally, offer a better interpretation than the teacher’s singing or reading. What is more, recorded material is often useful to non-native speaker teachers of English, who may welcome support with pronunciation and intonation.

The videos designed as components of general courses sometimes just illustrate grammar or vocabulary according to recognisably structural approaches; in other words, the video is the medium to present the content of an ordinary grammar lesson and the sequences resemble the pages of a book. The disadvantage of such material is that, in the long run, children recognise that the video is simply ‘more work’ and switch off. In other cases, the videos present stories, short sketches/scenes/plays, or short documentaries and these can make an outstanding contribution to learning and motivation. Young learners are attracted by videos even if they are beyond their language level and through the exposure to videos they absorb language in a natural way.

In conclusion to this section I wish to suggest that, as there is no method suiting all teachers and all contexts, similarly there is no textbook able to satisfy all situations and in making choices both the teacher’s and the learners’ needs should be catered for (McGrath, 2002). As course books reflect different principles about language and language learning it may be very frustrating for teachers to work with materials inspired by views they do not share or proposing activities unfeasible in their
contexts. However, course books can also be powerful agents of change (Hutchinson and Torres: 1994). For example, when teachers discover the book introduces innovative approaches and they are able to accept the challenges these bring.

Even in the case of “good” course books, it is still the teacher’s task to mediate between the book and the class. There are various aspects to this mediation, including:

- teaching learners how to use the course independently for their homework or personal study, as this skill cannot be taken for granted in the case of young learners
- decisions about the pace in using the book
- rewording instructions in more comprehensible ways
- adapting some activities to make them easier or more challenging or more communicative
- designing lead-in activities to create an interest for what will be found in the book and follow-up activities to encourage the transfer of the learning to other contexts
- enriching what the text offers with supplementary activities.

This mediation is not an “unfortunate necessity” (Prabhu, 1989: 68) but an essential task connected with the teaching profession and especially with teaching young learners. In fact the selection of materials is only the first stage in translating teaching intentions into classroom activities and “there is a necessary second stage for teachers to carry out which includes reducing or increasing the distance between learners and materials; value for learning lies in the match achieved between learners and materials, rather than in any inherent features of materials themselves” (ibid.: 68).

At this point you are advised to read Halliwell (1992) who dedicates chapter 4 to how to make the most from working with a course book (take note of two suggestions that you find worth trying in your context); and Rixon (1999) who deals with the choice of vocabulary in text books.

5.2.2 Supplementary Materials

A definition of supplementary materials was given in 5.2 and therefore here I will start from the reasons justifying their use. The decision to supplement the course book with other materials may be “syllabus driven” (McGrath 2002: 89), that is motivated by the need of giving learners something which is not in the book but is in the assessment, or “be prompted by affective considerations”, that is making the language content more palatable and friendly for learners. “Both types of supplementation - the cognitively-motivated and the affectively-motivated - need to be fully integrated into course plans and lesson plans if they have to be maximally
**Task 4**

The following are examples of supplementary materials. How would you classify them?

Maps, simplified readers, flash cards, original films, handouts, flash-cards, questionnaires, pictures, comics, dictionaries, advertisements, activity books for native speaker children, resource books, story books for native speaker children, pedagogic videocassettes, train tickets, menus, board games, charts with key sentences, songs, game collections, calendars, labels, texts on T-shirts and boxes, activity packages, lesson plans on the web, photos.

In doing Task 4 you may have noticed that the classification depends on the aspects considered and the above items could be grouped in different ways:

- According to users, in fact some could go directly into the children’s hands, while others are for teachers to draw inspiration from; “activity packages”, “game collections”, “resource books” and sites with lesson plans belong to this latter group.
- According to type of language, as the classical distinction between pedagogic and authentic materials could be applied. The former would be referred to as those specifically designed for language learning while the latter as those designed for native speaker children (you may already be familiar with the debate over the term “authentic” from your readings for the CMD Module, if it is one you have taken). It is also worth remembering that some recent perspectives do not make a distinction between pedagogic and authentic texts and look at texts of any kind just as “texts”, independently from the target for
which they were originally designed. (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001).

- According to media.
- Published or teacher-made (some of the above may be produced both commercially and by teachers).
- To be used as reference, for autonomous work or class work.

Maps and calendars can be classified as supplementary materials if used as texts and as “realia” (see next section) if used as objects.

It is impossible to deal with all kinds of supplementary materials in detail in this unit and so the following task will give you an opportunity to consider at least some of them with reference to their potentialities as language learning tools.

**Task 5**

Choose three of the following and decide how they could be exploited in teaching English to young learners. What are their advantages and disadvantages?

- Photos
- Simplified readers
- “Authentic” story-books
- Dictionaries
- Game collections
- Handouts
- Charts
- “Authentic” videos and films (appropriate to age and affective and cognitive level)
- Maps

Compare your ideas with those in Appendix D

A special word is necessary about the new technologies that have become part of our everyday life and that are now well established in many contexts in their role in instruction and particularly in language learning. In the case of technologies too it is necessary to make a distinction between teachers and learners as direct users. In many countries children are perfectly at ease using computers at home and the presence of such technology in the language classroom can be an obvious source of motivation for them.
The world-wide web is an immense source of supplementary materials. The internet offers materials that teachers can download and print for use as they would use other print based resources. A word of caution is, however, necessary as using materials from the web is like using any other published material and might not respond to your linguistic or pedagogic criteria for appropriate materials. It is also necessary to check whatever comes from the web before passing it to the children, as spelling mistakes are not rare.

In some schools it is also possible to use the internet during lessons. In this case, children can do a variety of activities and then have immediate feedback and a chance to try again when they do not get things right. The advantages of this are that individual learners or pairs can work at their own pace with a tendency to work faster than when similar things are done with printed materials. A risk is that, as it has been observed in some classes, some children just “click” without even reading the questions and their involvement is limited to having fun watching the way the feedback is given!

Not all teachers share the same enthusiasm for technologies and some who feel at ease using technologies for themselves may not feel equally comfortable when using computers with their English classes. Task 6 is an opportunity for you to become aware of your position on this issue.

Task 6

Reflect on the following:

- Do you like using technology?
- What is your experience about word-processing? Internet? Email? Participation in discussion lists? CD-ROMs? Other opportunities?
- What technology is available in your YL context? What is your experience in using it?
- What are the features of good quality technological materials for young learners of English (consider CDs and internet).
- What is the policy of your institution about the use of technologies for young learners of English?

(This task is an adapted version of Task 7 of TYL Unit 8 2003 edition)

Even with technologies, it still tends to be the teacher who chooses the site learners have to work with and decides the length of time dedicated to this activity. Once
learners are engaged with the technology, the teacher’s task is, above all, to monitor if and how the technology contributes to developing learning. In fact some of the activities found on the internet and in CDs have all the features of the type of mechanical activities we would ban as old-fashioned if we saw them on a printed hand-out! Remember that the internet and other resources are just that – resources. Like any resource, they can be over or under exploited and contribute more or less to successful learning.

The use of information technologies with young language learners has not yet been much researched. A project using a language learning network for primary school children is described by Milton and Garbi (2000). In this project there is an imaginary country called “Centralia” that provides access to virtual countries where children can go to practise their foreign languages. The activities are designed to be conducted collaboratively by children in different countries from their computer terminals. They include content and functional areas appropriate for primary school beginners such as “naming animals and expressing plurality” and “describing appearance, colours and clothes” (Ibid: 4). A research project to provide E-Learning materials in the area of vocabulary for Japanese primary schools is reported in Chujo and Nishigaki, (2004).

Your core reading for this section is Moon, 2005, Chapter 10 dealing with ways of getting children involved in making and using resources.

5.3 Realia (the ideas for this section are taken from Balbi, 1997, pages 35 – 37)

The teaching of foreign languages to young learners has traditionally been associated with tools other than those generally associated with teaching other subjects and Realia are the best example. Realia means “real things”; in the context of language teaching the term refers to the objects used for language learning purposes. This practice was first introduced by the direct method but as a technique it is often associated with other ways of teaching especially in the case of young learners.

Objects of all kinds can be used for teaching vocabulary, TPR activities, guessing games, descriptions, making hypotheses, story-telling and culture. These activities could be done in other ways, and not necessarily with realia, but using them can be particularly effective in the early stages of language learning. Their potential lies in the creation of immediate links between language and things that learners can see, touch and manipulate and therefore they become a support to memory. Realia can be useful in topic based and cross-curricular activities.
Some “real things” seem to be particularly attractive to children, such as puppets, masks, toys or easy to use materials such as dough and plasticine. Puppets, for example, can be used to invent characters, for role-plays, to practise oral production and interaction. Their asset is that they are real and imaginary at the same time. It is not unusual to introduce English to beginners’ classes through a puppet that “speaks only English” and shy children like talking through a puppet.

Many teachers find Cuisenaire rods effective to attract young learners’ attention and so exploit them to represent characters in stories and move them around to help learners to visualize places and events within stories. Another way of using them is in teaching grammar, where the differently coloured and sized rods are used to represent parts of speech, thus providing a visual support for learners. The effect of rods is not as immediate as that of other realia as their success depends on the teacher establishing an atmosphere in which they can be used creatively. In many activities with rods learners are in a position to use their imagination and have fun.

Sound and music are not realia in the classical sense; however they are real things that can be used in the language classroom as a starting point for discussion, for inventing a story, for constructing imaginary environments, etc.

One of the advantages of realia is the possibility of organizing speaking activities without any reference to written texts.

### Task 7

What items of realia do you use already in your classroom?

Which criteria would you consider in deciding whether to use an item of realia?

What are, in your opinion and according to your experience, the things to avoid when using realia?

Before getting involved with realia, we think that we should ask ourselves whether the item

- is easily available or if the effort to get it is out of proportion with reference to its contribution to learning
- is attractive and interesting for the learners
- is potentially able to excite curiosity and elicit language
- is functional to the learning aim or if it is likely to distract
- reflects the target culture and how.

The possible dangers might be:
• Overuse (when realia are present in all activities and are redundant instead of being functional)
• Routine (when objects are used in ritual ways and add no cues or interest to the scenario)
• Over-practice of the function of identification (“what is this? It is a…”) and of descriptive language at the expense of interaction.
• The classroom becomes a sort of junk shop!

As said above, realia are good from the affective perspective because they are something learners can touch and their presence in the classroom may be a reminder of the language input connected to them. However, for certain activities and in some contexts, alternatives such as projecting an image with the computer may be easier and quicker for the teacher.

One of the most successful activities feasible with realia is the “show ’n tell circle”, a common activity in L1 in primary schools in some countries and easily transferable to L2/FL contexts. The children and the teacher sit in a circle together and take turns to introduce something important for them. They ‘show ‘n tell’ why it is important. This can be done with toys, objects, books, etc. Some useful language can be taught in advance (Example. this… is important for me because it reminds me of…; this… is important for me because it’s a present from…; this… is important for me because I bought it in… etc.). Learners will then use the language learnt to express very personal contents at their choice. In addition, during the activity, learners can be given further help if needed. Preparing the presentation could be a motivating homework activity that would later facilitate the sharing in class.

5.4 Activities

In section 5.2 course books and supplementary materials have been dealt with in a way similar to discussing candy boxes or wine bottles versus boxes of candies or bottles of wine as their suitability can actually be evaluated only with reference to their content, that is the language and activities they propose. In this section we will explore the features of some activities that are common in young learners’ classes and analyse some examples.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

This technique introduced by Asher (2003) as the basis of his method exploits the coordination of speech and action. Performing physical actions following instructions in the target language is a way of exposing learners to comprehensible
input in a situation where stress is minimized; this kind of activity is good for kinaesthetic intelligence and for all children in general as there is a lot of movement and fun but at the same time the activity is controlled. These characteristics make it particularly suitable for teaching the 4-8 age group. Older learners enjoy it but in small doses!

In this module TPR has already been mentioned in Units 3 and 4. Here we wish to focus on how it can be extended beyond its basic form. When introducing TPR, the commands could be very basic: stand up, sit down, walk to the door, touch your head etc.; then some variations can make it more challenging and more fun: walk slowly… very slowly, touch your knees immediately, walk quickly to the door, touch it and then run back to your place. Another variation is to create a context and invite the children to mime a series of actions: let’s get ready to go out… it’s cold today… put your socks on… put your boots on… open the wardrobe and take your coat… and… don’t forget gloves… (For this example Rita is indebted to her colleague Paola Traverso). The famous game “Simon Says” (see Unit 3, Appendix D) is a TPR activity.

Fiona also experienced a TPR lesson in which, amongst other things, she had to draw the body parts of a beetle on the back of another participant. It worked – she still remembers the language structure!

In a sense, activities which involve some sort of “making” could be categorised as TPR but, in this case, following the instructions does not require just movement but other, more complex skills. (An example is when learners are given instructions to draw something.)

For examples of TPR activities within the context of a drama project see Appendix E.

Stories

Stories exist and are told in all cultures and, if delivered in a creative way, they can be fascinating for listeners of all ages. However, most people consider stories to be the prerogative of children and believe that children enjoy stories whatever the occasion. Actually, there is a fundamental difference between bed-time stories and stories in the classroom. In the former context, stories form part of a parent-child routine and can have meanings for participants that go far beyond the content of the story. In the latter context, such meanings are not present and other factors, such as what other children are doing or saying, may make it difficult for children to concentrate on the story, even if the subject matter interests them. In other words, stories are not the panacea that some teachers believe them to be.
Nevertheless, stories can constitute an intrinsic element of classroom practice. According to Ellis and Brewster (2002) stories constitute mini-syllabuses as they provide the starting point and rich context for developing a wide variety of language and learning activities involving young learners in a personal way through creativity. What stories can mean in language learning is well described by Wright (1995: 6 – 8):

*Stories, which rely so much on words, offer a major and constant source of language experience... children want to find meaning in stories, so they listen with a purpose... stories help children become aware of the general feel and sound of the foreign language... stories also introduce children to language items and sentence constructions... they can build up a reservoir of language in this way... when the time comes to move the language items into their productive control, it is no great problem because the language is not new to them... stories can be used to develop the children’s powers of awareness, analysis, and expression, as well as relating to other aspects of the curriculum... when focusing on features of the language be careful not to lose the magic of the story altogether....*

Cameron (2001) maintains that stories are good examples of a holistic approach to language learning and suggests criteria for their evaluation which consider their narrative qualities as well as their language learning potential. Aspects to consider are characters and plot; acceptability of the values and attitudes embodied; the organization of discourse; the balance between new and recycled language. She then presents valuable ways of working with stories that lead learners to understand and appreciate their content and, at the same time, develop their language skills.

Stories can be read or told by the teacher. Both ways need preparation if they are to be delivered “with some sense of drama” (ibid: 21) so that the listeners get pleasantly absorbed in the experience. (In England and in other countries too, there are professional story tellers whose techniques can inspire teachers to bring stories to life.) ‘Telling a story’ can be preferable to ‘reading a story out loud’ as the gestures, dramatisation and eye contact that the story teller uses makes the story easier to understand. What is more, a teacher telling a story is better able to monitor understanding in the audience of young learners than he/she is when reading and his/her eyes are mostly on the page. When telling, repetitions and adaptations can be made in the telling to ensure that the children are able to understand the gist.

This is not to say that reading stories out loud is without value: indeed, many teachers of young learners will report positive experiences of this activity (Mourão, 2006). Reading and re-reading the same words creates expectations in the listeners of both narrative and language, features which young children in particular enjoy.
The value of illustrations in making stories comprehensible has been mentioned in 5.2.2. and cannot be underestimated (many publishers of children’s stories now feature ‘big books’ in their catalogues which make visuals easier to share with learners). Visuals can also be used to recycle language and to create interest in the story before reading or telling. Other ways to create interest include introductory activities, with questions aiming at making hypotheses about the development of the story, demonstrating actions, and inviting learners to mime actions. After reading, the learners themselves can retell or dramatize the story, talk about what they liked or did not like and about the different characters, describe the places in the story, or say what feelings the stories evoked in them. Key sentences can be used as reference and reminders of language patterns.

### Task 9

#### Part 1

If there is an almost general consensus about the positive role of stories in language courses for young learners, there is a debate about the features that make stories suitable for the language classroom. Here are some common points of view:

- It is better to use stories the children already know because this helps comprehension
- It is better to use stories the children do not know otherwise they lose interest
- Even if the simple past is the typical tense of stories, stories should be told in the present because the past is difficult for young learners
- Stories are the ideal context to expose young learners to some forms of past tense in a natural way
- Stories should be representative of the target culture
- Stories should be representative of all cultures
- Young learners enjoy “classical” stories (examples: Three Little Pigs, Little Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty)
- Young learners like modern stories
- Stories for the language classroom should have a repetitive pattern.

Which of the above would you support? Give reasons for your choice. Would you differentiate your answers with reference to language level and/or age?

#### Part 2

Look at the stories in Appendix F and for each of them identify:
• Topic
• Cross curricular links, if any
• Structure
• Language content
• Suitability with reference to one of your classes (do not limit your consideration just to linguistic aspects!)
• How each of the stories meets your preferred criteria from the list above
• Adaptations needed to tell the story to a specific class you have in mind
• If it is suitable to be told or read by the teacher
• If it is suitable for personal reading.

Compare your answers with those in Appendix G, when possible

Before going further you are advised to read Cameron (2001) Chapter 7 - one of the core readings for this unit - and take notes of the things which are new for you and of those you find particularly relevant for introducing stories to young learners of English.

Drama

I hope you will forgive me if I start this section with another task, after the hard work of Task 8; however Task 9 is of a different nature as it is all based on your experience.

Task 10

Answer the following questions:

• When you were learning an L2, did you ever take part in some kind of drama activity? How did you feel? Is there anything from that experience that you could transfer to young learners? Anything you would rather avoid with young learners?

• Have you ever had any experience of doing drama with learners of English? If you have, what was the age of the learners? What were the positive points and what the challenges of that experience?

• Can you think of three reasons for doing (or for not doing) drama with young learners in the English classroom?

Compare your ideas with a colleague or start a discussion on this topic on the discussion list
In order to consider drama as one of the activities contributing to the development of language skills, I wish to make a preliminary distinction between drama as part of the ordinary learning experience and acting for an external audience such as other learners or the learners’ families. Both are potentially useful for the achievement of competence in L2 but they respond to different methodological criteria and foster different abilities.

Drama activities as part of the ordinary classroom life are process oriented, different every time and flexible about times and spaces; they encourage spontaneous and natural language use in an attempt to foster fluency. They promote a content-rich learning environment that creates meaningful and motivating contexts for communication. They can take just a short time in almost every lesson or, sometimes, be extended even to a whole lesson. They include:

- Mime which is basically a TPR activity where the emphasis is not just on doing actions but on expressing feelings and moods through the actions. The edge between some TPR activities and mime may be blurred as you can see from Appendix E. Mime is feasible also with very young learners.

- Dramatising songs, rhymes, poems. This has the advantage of being a choral activity and therefore, although oriented toward movement and production, is still a sheltered situation where shy learners are not over-exposed. Action songs are a real treat for the 4 - 9 age group! “Authentic” songs and rhymes may sometimes contain expressions of the literary domain or obsolete words; however this idiomatic element has a cultural value (Brown, 2006) as it is part of the experience of the native speakers. (For more on this point see Task 11)

- Role play, which involves the understanding of the features of the character to be impersonated and the use of imagination and language at the same time. It is improvising what to say in responding to the situation and to what has been said before; in this way, learning is enhanced by both the perceptive and the productive use of the target language. Role play is not performing dialogues by heart from the text-book in front of the class, a common misperception. Learners choose what to say and how to say it in order to lead the action towards their desired outcome. (Examples: role playing a known story but inventing a different conclusion; performing a picture story inventing the dialogue for it.) Role play with young learners is different from the same activity with older students or adults as YLs enjoy the more creative parts of role play and like being invented characters, their favourite heroes and also animals and things. Through role-play, learners construct an imagined experience rather than struggle to memorise a part written by someone else. They express their personalities and are confronted with both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication in a combined way. Role play is particularly suitable for the 8 -12 age-group.
Task 11

Look at the texts in Appendix H. What language content can children learn from them?

**Buckle my shoe** is good to revise numbers, learn rhythm and intonation, focus on some sounds; example ə as in “four”. The expressions in the text are not of common use in everyday conversation.

**One two** includes expressions useful for class life. The teacher can recycle them when necessary and refer to the rhyme as an aid to memory.

**Winnie’s Winter Song** is very rich in useful vocabulary and lexical chunks to describe weather and feelings; the teacher can refer to this text when discussing weather, clothes, likes and dislikes.

Drama produces the transfer of the language encountered in the activity to other contexts and children doing drama have often been reported using it spontaneously out of class too. All the above activities are a way to get learners’ whole selves involved with language and make it become active and real. They encourage learners to draw on skills which are essential for out of class use of language. The use of drama in the foreign language classroom implies that learners do their acting for developing language skills in a pleasant way and not for exhibition, although sometimes it may be appropriate for children to act out their scenes to the rest of the class. With drama, young learners experience a different mode of being and acting in the classroom environment and this can be of great help for the less academic and challenging students as it puts them in situations where they have more chances of succeeding and consequently being appreciated.

Performing for an external audience could be a natural development of the work done in class but it is not the necessary conclusion of the itinerary. With reference to learning, having to perform for an external audience can be an incentive to improve the quality of the oral production, especially in the direction of appropriate stress and intonation; besides, rehearsing a part contributes to the internalisation of language provided that the “actors” fully understand what they say and are not forced to learn parts beyond their linguistic competence. Drama for an audience is different from drama in the classroom not only because it relies on memory and rehearsal and aims at accuracy rather than fluency but because it is much more demanding from the point of view of organisation and time.

**5.5 Writing your own materials**

Moon suggests that “the main argument for designing your own materials is to ensure a better fit between your teaching and the needs of your pupils.” (Moon 2005:
and Lebrun says that the starting points for materials writing are the need to compensate for gaps in existing materials and a need or wish for innovation when “some kind of discussion or input suggests the possibility of trying something new”. (Lebrun, 1991: 103).

**Task 12**

Answer the following questions:

- Do you have any experience as a materials writer? If you do, what was your reason for creating your own materials? What kind of materials have you designed? What was the age of the learners?
- How did learners respond to them?
- What are, in your opinion, the challenges involved in writing your own materials, especially with reference to young learners?

Various authors (Jolly and Bolitho, 1998; Hurst, 2000; McGrath, 2002) suggest a series of steps for the design of materials. However I would highlight that this is not a linear process as, especially when writing whole courses or substantial parts of them as whole units, the phases are recurrent as the teacher/writer continually refines both the objectives and the texts and activities. Just as a reference point I wish to offer an adapted version of questions from Hopkins, 1996 for your reflection.

*What characterises the context in which the materials will be used?*

In Hurst’s terms this implies a “contemplation phase” to reflect on the learners, the linguistic and pedagogical goals the materials are meant to serve and the constraints of the situation. A risk to be avoided is that of being paralyzed by the constraints instead of trying to transform them into positive challenges. A very common constraint teachers mention is shortage of time; couldn’t we look at this issue from another perspective and ask ourselves: what are my priorities? Communicative language use? Listening comprehension? Vocabulary? Grammar? And then include what we believe to be the best things for our learners in the time available.

*In what terms will the aims of the materials be described?*

Moon (2005: 98) points out that “no one activity could satisfy all criteria simultaneously and you would need to decide on your priorities, depending on your goals and the needs of your learners on any particular occasion”. Some materials could have very limited objectives such as just reinforcing a particular language point, but nevertheless they are important as learners master various aspects of L2 competence at different times. Other materials may aim at developing skills or fluency beyond the level included in the textbook.
What kinds of approach are appropriate?
In this phase the teacher/writer has to come to terms with his/her biases about what works and what doesn’t work in the classroom with evidence from classroom data and the results of SLA research (Hurst 2000). When teacher made materials aim at improving learners’ weak points, the teacher/writer should question the approach adopted up to that point and see if it is time to try something different. This is even more important when materials aim at innovation. In the effort of identifying the right approach for specific materials, the teacher/writer may sometimes have to widen his/her perspectives and sometimes accept to do something that sounds like going back to ‘old stuff’ if this is what learners need. Examples: Teacher A has noticed that his class of eight year olds gets things right when they have to fill gaps or transform sentences or follow a fixed pattern but they cannot construct utterances from scratch and with reference to various contexts. He understands that limiting practice to “easy” exercises is not enough and constructs his handouts to introduce free practice, even if he had always thought it is too “difficult” for children. Teacher B has always focussed her teaching on communicative language use but her twelve year old class has to take an exam including a multiple choice grammar test; she has to give her learners some practice in this activity even if it is in contrast with her ordinary approach and so she designs some materials to this end. Teacher C believes that using a dictionary is too advanced a skill for her five year old group and so she prepares a picture dictionary with big pages for each word taught and uses it as reference during class time.

How are the materials structured?
This question is concerned with the actual production of the materials and this implies both pedagogic and practical decisions to take; examples of the former are:

- the degree of difficulty
- whether adapting existing materials or writing completely new ones
- whether producing materials for classroom use or for homework use
- whether using authentic texts or writing some for inclusion in the materials
- whether instructions are to be in L2 or L1 etc..

Examples of the latter are

- whether producing a series of handouts to be distributed when needed or providing the same activities in a CD offering a package
- whether having or not having colours for pictures
- whether making a recording or using the teacher’s voice for a listening activity etc..

Another important decision that involves both the pedagogic and the physical aspects of materials is the division of materials into teachable segments, taking into account the learners’ cognitive and affective characteristics, their attention span and the time and economic resources available.
How to go about writing materials based on texts (written texts, oral texts, texts on video etc.) that have attracted the teacher’s attention as being usable in the class (concept or text driven with reference to McGrath’s terminology, 2002) is somewhat different. First you should identify the characteristics of the text and decide if it is more suitable for skills work, systems work (phonology, grammar, discourse, lexis), or other purpose (e.g. work on culture). Then you should design activities with a specific class in mind.

Not all teachers are potential authors of published materials but designing some of the materials for your young learners’ classes is part of your professional development and is very rewarding; working with colleagues may result in even better materials but this has to be balanced against the time factor that meetings and discussions involve. As an encouragement, here are Hall’s remarks about materials writers:

*for Materials writers, it is worth bearing this in mind. You do not write to conform to somebody else’s model. You look at other people’s models and you read current theory, but in the end your materials and the writing of the materials will not be the simple passive implementation of someone else’s ideas. They will be developed in the interaction between the teacher and the students and contribute to the materials writing experience. …Both your own and other people’s beliefs about effective language learning will be modified and enriched by your experiences.* (Hall, 2001: 238)

The core reading for this section is Moon, 2005, Chapter 7, but try to read also Halliwell, 1995 Chapter 5, Lebrun, 1991.

**5.5 Looking ahead**

This Unit has dealt with a number of tools supporting language teaching and learning with reference to young learners and has probably made you aware, or more aware, of the fact that materials “are often the most tangible and visible component of pedagogy” (Nunan, 1991: 227). You should also be thinking about the importance of the teacher’s role in that it is the teacher’s mediation that affects the way learners perceive and respond to materials both affectively and cognitively. Furthermore, the real potential –or lack of potential – of materials “can only be evaluated in relation to real learners in real classrooms” and should be based “on the collection and analysis of classroom data” (Ibid.).

As you have seen in the unit, if there is a general consensus on some of the features of materials for young learners such as that they should combine a playful approach with high learning potential or be affectively, educationally and linguistically
appropriate, research on specific materials for young learners is rather scanty. Any ideas for areas to explore? What about:

- Identifying some research areas regarding the impact of specific materials on learners in different contexts?
- Exploring if and how technologies can support specific aspects of language development in the ESOL or EFL context?
- Designing materials according to innovative criteria and trying them out to see how they work in a specific context?

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### Appendix A

**Potential advantages and disadvantages of using or not using a course-book**

(From IRRE Liguria materials, 2004, Author: Rita Balbi)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using a course book</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Potential Advantages for the teacher** | • Planned sequence covering language content in a coherent progression and exhaustively (with reference to the level)  
• Structure organizing the different phases of a learning unit in a balanced way and providing routines  
• Cuts on preparation time  
• Gives security  
• Is linguistically appropriate  
• Suggests practical teaching ideas  
• It is easier to be “transparent” about the content of the course  
• Promotes better practice, new teaching skills and innovation, if it is “good” and innovative |
| **Potential Advantages for Learners** | • Provides a reference point  
• Can be used for individual revision and practice  
• Has a high graphic standard  
• Is considered as something valuable to be kept also when course is over |
| **Potential Disadvantages** | • If followed slavishly, it may turn into a constraint rather than a resource and contribute to deskilling the teacher |

*Written by Rita Balbi  
May 2008*
### Potential Disadvantages for Learners
- It may generate boredom if used in many classes or for many years
- The course book may not be coherent with an approach to the target language relying mainly on project work or integration of the language with other areas of the curriculum

### No course book

#### Potential Advantages for the Teacher
- Each lesson can be planned according to the learners’ needs and interests
- Unsuccessful activities can be modified immediately
- Content and activities are flexible and can be matched to the children’s progress
- Develops the teacher’s skills, creativity and imagination

#### Potential Advantages for Learners
- More variety of activities
- Less reliance on the written word and more attention to the oral language
- More adaptability to the children’s level and interests
- No or very low cost for families

#### Potential Disadvantages for the Teacher
- Unclear focus and risk of random selection of language content
- Very demanding from the point of view of time, energies and skills
- Difficulty in finding adequate materials and visual aids
- Difficulty or impossibility of producing audio-resources of decent quality
- It may be more difficult to prove accountability in case of problems with families or other stake-holders

#### Potential Disadvantages for Learners
- Materials distributed by the teacher are perceived as more “temporary” than books and are easily lost
- Materials graphically poorer than books
- Limited reference points
Appendix B


The analysis and evaluation of course books can be conducted in three ways: the impressionistic method, the checklist method, and the in-depth method.

The outcome of impressionistic analysis is a general impression of the material. It is based on glancing at the blurb and the contents page and then on skimming through the book or part of it. It may also include a more careful analysis of specific features or specific chapters.

The checklist method consists of the systematic consideration of the presence of a list of features expressed through a set of criteria based on linguistic, psychological and methodological principles.

The in-depth method requires a careful analysis of the approach to language and language learning with the aim of checking if the course actually corresponds to the way it is presented and advertised. It should go beyond the more easily identifiable aspects to catch the underlying principles. According to Littlejohn (1998) this can happen through a three level process according to which the first is concerned with the structure of the course, the second with the analysis of what learners are expected to do and the third on the deduction of the rationale behind the course in terms of aims, roles and SLA theory.

Appendix C

From 2004 IRRE Liguria materials; Author: Rita Balbi

Features to consider in analyzing and evaluating course books.

1. Structure

- Is there a pupil’s book and a workbook? (How many volumes? How do volumes relate to ages?)
- Is there a teacher’s book?
- Is the teacher’s book accompanied by supplementary materials?
• Are there any audio-cassettes? Video-tapes? CDs?

2. Goals

• What are learners expected to know/to be able to do through working with the course? (Consider ability to communicate, language awareness, culture)
• Are the aims coherent with the aims of the course you are teaching?
• Are the expected outcomes realistic for your context?

3. Approach to language

• Focus on structures? On functions? On notions? On lexis?
• Is there a balance among the previous aspects?
• Does language derive from content or is content affected by the need of exemplifying language?
• Is there any explicit teaching of grammar?
• Is language organized according to a linear sequence? Or a cyclical sequence?
• Is there a variety of functions and forms in each lesson or is each lesson based on a single function or form?

4. Treatment of the four skills

• Focus on listening-comprehension? On speaking? (Self-expression or interaction?) On reading-comprehension? On writing? (Exercises? Communicative writing such as a card to send to a real person? Creative writing?)
• Focus on the integration of the four skills?

5. Language use

• What kind of language use are learners involved in? Mechanical activities? Open activities? Controlled activities? Guided activities? Activities in which they can express their own ideas and in the way they prefer? Tasks? Cross-curricular activities?
• Do the activities cater for different learning styles and types of intelligence? Are there any tests or feedback activities?
• Are there any songs? (Easy and pleasant rhythm? “Authentic” or written for language learning?)
• Are there any games? (Competitive or cooperative? Suitable for small groups or whole class? Do they require production in L2? Are they “authentic” games or exercises disguised as games? Suitable for indoor space or outdoor space?)
6. Texts and Topics

- Are learners exposed to a variety of texts and discourse types? (Dialogues? Poems? Stories? Comics? Instructions to make a…?)
- Are topics suitable and motivating for the age range?
- Do they respect the values and culture of your context?
- Do they have any educational values?

7. Approach to culture

- What is the context of the course? (No explicit reference to any place? A specific country? A country where the target language is spoken? Various countries?)
- Are there any characters representing the target culture or other cultures?
- Is there any explicit teaching of culture?
- Is the approach to culture descriptive or prescriptive?
- Is culture introduced through photos and drawings? Reading? Discovery activities? Awareness raising activities?

8. Lay-out

- Consistent lay-out for each chapter?
- Clear lay-out?
- Colours?
- Pictures? Photos? (To support comprehension? Just ornamental? To elicit production? To sustain cultural information?)

9. Audio-aids

- Do they provide varied and natural models?
- Are the speakers too fast? Too slow?
- Is the sound quality adequate?

10 Teacher’s book and resource pack

- Is there a teacher’s book? A resource pack?
- Does it present the guiding principles underlying the materials?
- Does it provide suggestions to teach all individual units?
- Does it provide further ideas for follow up activities?
Appendix D

Examples of ways of exploiting some common types of supplementary materials
(This text has been written by Rita Balbi for this Unit)

• Photos

Photos make learning easier for visual learners but are useful for all learners. They can be used for guessing games and for descriptions; as a way to observe and discover some aspects of culture; as a starting point to invent a story or write a poem; as a means to check reading or listening comprehension; to practise specific language points, for instance: vocabulary or ways to express location or how to compare items of different dimension etc. or as a topic for conversation etc.

• Simplified readers

Young learners can be encouraged to start reading in English by themselves using simplified readers as they are generally user friendly and children experience a sense of achievement in seeing that they can cope with a book in L2. Simplified readers are useful for general language reinforcement but not as much to promote complex reading skills as they are not required to access the meaning of these texts. However they can contribute to the acquisition of very basic reading skills such as the recognition of letters and words. Young learners should be free to choose the titles they prefer for personal reading and encouraged to read for pleasure, without always having to complete tasks and activities. (Williams, 2002).

These texts or part of them can be used for parallel writing with the advantage that learners have a safe model to rely on but are encouraged to express their own ideas.

In the classroom they can be a source of a variety of speaking and follow-up activities.

• “Authentic” story-books

The way to use them depends on the characteristics of the text and some may be too much beyond the language range of learners. In choosing authentic texts, teachers should see that they are approachable and there is a balance between the learners’ cognitive and linguistic level and the element of challenge, necessarily involved in coping with an ungraded text. Authentic texts are not grammatically sequenced and expose learners to a variety of forms at the same time, which reflects a real life situation where language users, independently from age, will have to find meaning through visual cues and context. They also include items of idiomatic language.
which take learners beyond the vocabulary normally found in course books. They can be used for story-telling followed by reading (some have a giant edition for shared reading, Robinson, 2002) and are also available in very small formats for personal reading. Authentic story books can be used also for culture and for study-skills (learning about chapters, index etc.)

Another way of using these materials is just giving learners opportunities to touch them, look at them, “read” them, enjoy them without any specific task (Williams, 2002) and let them become familiar with L2 texts as a normal and positive dimension of their daily lives and, at the same time, absorb some language naturally. Learners could also be encouraged to focus on what they know and on the gist of stories without worrying about what they cannot understand and thus learn to cope with partial comprehension and with comprehension as a process. “Paradoxically, the younger the children are, the easier it is to find suitable authentic materials for them, as the gap between the cognitive and the linguistic level is less perceptible in materials for the very young ones” (Balbi, 1997:43).

A special category of authentic story books refers to the texts written for native speaker children who, either because of age or poor literacy, need materials characterized by absolute clarity of text, pictures and print. These texts are particularly good for young learners of English as a foreign or second language as they, in contrast with simplified readers, still show the characteristics of authentic language however combining them with facilitating devices such as the recycling of key structures in parallel contexts and the use of vocabulary rated as frequent in one of the official frequency lists.

- **Dictionaries**

Some teachers maintain that young learners should try to do the most with the lexis they know and dictionaries should not be used at least at primary level. I would argue that we all probably agree with the former part of the previous statement and have different opinions about the latter. Another issue is the debate between using monolingual or bilingual dictionaries. There are children’s editions of both types, often accompanied by pictures. Using dictionaries is an activity suitable for the children above eight or nine and is a precious investment in the area of study skills. Young learners can be taught about how to consult dictionaries and this can be done in a playful way; there may be a competition to find out the English for three words that will then be used in an activity, or the native language equivalent of three words encountered in a text. With monolingual dictionaries older children can be asked to find out and tell the definitions of three words from a text or check the spelling of a word they have written inappropriately. Older children can be taught how to look for words as at their first trials of using dictionaries they tend to look for words as they encounter them and not through the base form; this happens both when they look for the English form and their native language form. This can be learnt with practice.
in looking for words they know taken from a text and with questions to guide them to discover why they have not found what they had been looking for. Another activity might be to make a hypothesis about the meaning of an unknown word and then check the word in either a monolingual or a bilingual dictionary.

- **Game collections**
  The value of game collections is mainly for the teacher to have a source to draw ideas to organize real games, not “exercises” disguised as games! Playing games is one of the typical activities of childhood and playing games in L2 is therefore authentic language use. The learning element for the children starts from listening to and understanding the instructions and goes on with the use of the language as required by the procedure and rules of the game. Real games may imply, listening and/or speaking, and/or reading and more rarely writing. The spoken part of many games consists of fixed chunks or patterns that children can also learn from each other while playing the game.

- **Handouts**
  Handouts are commercially available but are probably the most common type of teacher made supplementary material and the one closer to course books. Obviously their motivating and learning value depends on what they propose. The availability of computers enables teachers to give their materials an attractive and elegant layout and easily incorporate visual elements when necessary. They may be used for grammar and vocabulary work, for items to focus in listening or reading comprehension, for guided writing, for observation activities etc. One of their advantages is that they can be used to differentiate tasks according to levels or topics.

- **Charts**
  It is common practice to display charts in young learners’ classrooms. They are often part of the packages accompanying course books but can also be produced by teachers themselves and here again computers can help. Charts make key language points visible to learners who can look at them for reference when needed. They are often used for basic classroom language, example: *what’s the English for...? Can I check in the book? What’s the spelling of...?* Or for word order in questions: *where is John? Is John at home? Can you play football? Do you like playing football?*

- **Authentic videos and films (appropriate to age and affective and cognitive level)**
  If the comprehension of authentic printed materials may pose difficulties this is even more the case with videos and films especially at the learners’ initial experiences with them as, at the beginning, also the young ones tend to worry about the spoken element. However, this difficulty is easy to overcome if this means is used regularly
and appropriately, as “by combining spoken language with images, videos parallel life” (Phillips, 1993:133). Also in the case of videos and films it is the way in which they are presented and exploited that makes the difference. Short (Phillips suggests 5 to 10 minutes) but sense making bits of videos or films can be shown with tasks requiring general comprehension, as emerging from the visual element. In this way, children would experience a sense of confidence as they can do the task even if they do not understand the spoken message. Then children can be progressively led to the comprehension of the spoken message still with the help of visual clues. Especially young children enjoy watching the same videos many times and this would help them to absorb language naturally and in a pleasant way as, after the first impact, video provides an intensive and attractive way of contact with L2. Clips of videos and films (or short videos) are a wonderful springboard for a lot of talking activities, association tasks (example: association of objects or places with characters, characters with feelings, characters with attitudes, characters with ages etc.) and for observing different cultures. Tasks should be challenging and thought provoking but still retain an element of enjoyment.

- Maps
Maps of towns, regions and countries combine the development of linguistic skills with general cross-curricular skills, of which the first is for what purposes and how to read a map. Maps can be used to practise specific language items such as how to ask about and give directions, description of location, comparing sizes and positions.

Some maps show also the monuments, historic places, products and industries of a region. They can be used with older children for culture and cross-curricular work.

Appendix E


Before Step 3.2 there is a listening activity based on a song with movement actions.

Step 3.2 Moving as clowns (page: 33)

- In order to introduce the activity ask the children to create a space where they can all stand in a circle: Let’s move desks and create a space where we all can stand in a circle… not too close to each other as we need space for movement.
- Encourage the children to remember the movement expressions from the song and elicit other suggestions: Can you remember the expressions about movement in the song? Give the children time to answer; can you think of
other movements? If the children’s contributions are in L1, provide the English equivalent; if necessary, add some to the children’s list; write the list on the blackboard.

- When there are about 8/10 movement actions in the list, say: you remember from last lessons that clowns are all different... they also move in different ways... the way they move shows their personality... now move as clowns... show me a clown walking... show me a clown walking slowly... show me a clown walking as a robot... show me a clown crawling... let me see a clown crawling fast... very fast... let me see a clown hopping... dance as a happy clown... walk as a sad clown... walk as a smart clown... let me see a clown skating on ice... let me see a clown walking on a rope... etc.

Notes:

The expressions above are just examples while teachers are advised to use the expressions brainstormed by the children. For sure the children will enjoy doing unusual things such as rolling etc.

As said in Session 1, giving the English equivalent of the children’s contributions in L1 shows them that what they suggest is appreciated; besides it is a way to extend their vocabulary in the target language providing them with the means to say what they have chosen to say.

If the children do not understand the actions they have to perform, the teacher demonstrates them and recycles them after some time, preferably with some change; example: jump…and later jump backwards.

This is basically a TPR activity, however it is advisable not to limit it to a list of one word instructions but use it to expose the children to a richer and more varied input; example: walk slowly, very slowly; let me see a tired clown walking... pretend you are a clown cycling etc.

The teacher should also focus on the fact that the same movement can be performed in different ways; example: walk slowly/fast/heavily/lightly/looking at the ground/ looking up; show me a clown moving on a rope... move two steps forwards, move three steps backwards etc.

Having to learn to perform the same actions in different ways requires attention, elicits creativity and prepares the children for staging.

The following unit starts with another TPR activity

Step 4.1 Clowns’ actions (page: 35)
• Recreate the atmosphere with music or rhyme or song.
• Introduce the activity linking it to the previous lesson: *Can you remember how clowns move? Show and tell me* Give the children time to respond showing and describing
• After some examples from the children, ask: *What else do clowns do?*
• Reinforce what the children have contributed with a “listen and do” activity. You might say: *Now you act as clowns; let me see a clown laughing... show me a clown playing drums... show me a clown eating an ice-cream... take a deep bow... shake hands... let me see a clown clapping hands... sing as a happy clown... let me see a clown juggling etc.*

**Notes:**
The list of actions is potentially endless here; however for this activity the teacher should exploit the ideas that the children contribute and suggest some new actions to add variety, only if necessary.

**Appendix F**

**F.1 The enormous Turnip (from IRRE Liguria materials, 1992, from the classic tale by Tolstoi)**

Once upon a time there was a farmer. He had some turnip seeds and planted them. The seeds grew and he was very happy when he saw a very big turnip. It was enormous!

One day he wanted to eat the turnip and so he went into his garden and pulled it but it did not move. He called a woman: *“Come and help me!”* The woman pulled the man, the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and the turnip did not move.

The woman called a boy: *“Come and help us!”* The boy pulled the woman, the woman pulled the man and the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and the turnip did not move.

The boy called a girl: *“Come and help us!”* The girl pulled the boy, the boy pulled the woman, the woman pulled the man and the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and the turnip did not move.

The girl called a dog: *“Come and help us!”* The dog pulled the girl, the girl pulled the boy, the boy pulled the woman, the woman pulled the man and the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and the turnip did not move.
The dog called a cat: “Come and help us!” The cat pulled the dog, the dog pulled the girl, the girl pulled the boy, the boy pulled the woman, the woman pulled the man and the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and the turnip did not move.

The cat called a mouse: “Come and help us!” The mouse pulled the cat, the cat pulled the dog, the dog pulled the girl, the girl pulled the boy, the boy pulled the woman, the woman pulled the man and the man pulled the turnip. They pulled and pulled and pulled and the turnip popped out. They were excited! They carried the turnip into the kitchen and had turnip soup for lunch.

F. 2 The Bears’ Night Out

See your module blackboard

Appendix G

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Enormous Turnip</th>
<th>The Bears’ Night Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>Teddy bears; habitat of various kinds of bears and koalas, friendship; acceptance of diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a classical story taking place in the countryside but with an element of subtle humour as here the solution to the problem is due to the smallest and weakest character, in contrast with what happens in most stories.</td>
<td>Science with reference to animals and the environment; Social studies with reference to friendship and acceptance of diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cross curricular links</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and food in the countryside.</td>
<td>Science with reference to animals and the environment; Social studies with reference to friendship and acceptance of diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive situations expressed with repetitive language.</td>
<td>Similar basic situations but with different details; repetition of some key sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language content</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary related to topic; simple past; imperative; once upon a time</td>
<td>Vocabulary related to topic; simple past; I wish I were, ways to express location, movement, climate, feelings; to tell and to say,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General suitability and adaptations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story seems suitable for telling the 6 – 9 age group, including beginners; it could be easily dramatised and would involve a lot of fun in the mime and repetition of “pulled and pulled”;</td>
<td>The story seems suitable for the 10 – 12 age-group excluding beginners; in any case it would need some adaptations to limit the vocabulary range in FL contexts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the 8 - 9 age group could use it also for personal reading if you can provide them with one of the many illustrated editions available. See also http://www.eurotales.eril.net/turnip.uk.htm

As it is particularly appealing affectively, it would be a good opportunity to teach some “advanced” language not included in textbooks. It is suitable for telling and dramatising but probably, only fairly advanced groups could enjoy the reading.

Appendix H

Buckle my shoe

One two
Buckle my shoe;
Three, four
Knock at the door;
Five, six
Pick up sticks;
Seven, eight
Lay them straight;
Nine ten
A big fat hen

(From 100 Nursery Rhymes, Ladybird; selected by Anne Mc Kie and illustrated by Ken Mc Kie, page 34)

One two.

One, two, three, four
One, two, three, four
Come in please and shut the door

Five, six, seven, eight
It’s time for school. You are late.

Nine, ten, nine, ten
Don’t be late for school again

Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008
(From Julian Dakin, Songs and Rhymes, Longman)

**Winnie’s Winter Song**

Winnie’s in her house  
She looks at the snow  
She wants to go out  
But it’s winter. Oh no.

She puts on her coat  
She puts on her hat,  
She goes to the garden  
With Wilbur the cat

But where are the flowers?  
And where is the sun?  
Winnie is cold  
She is not having fun

She doesn’t like ice  
She doesn’t like snow.  
She wants to be warm.  
But it’s winter. Oh no.

(From “Winnie in Winter” by Korky Paul and Valerie Thomas; adapted by Paul Shipton. O.U.P, page 13)
TYL 6

Literacy, Reading and writing

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

6.1 Introduction
6.2 The role of the written word in today’s world
6.3 Children becoming literate in their own language
6.4 Becoming literate in English as a second or foreign language
6.5 Reading and Writing in English in the YL classroom
   6.5.1. Reading Activities
   6.5.2. Writing Activities
6.6 Further considerations about reading and writing
   6.6.1. The issue of accuracy
   6.6.2. Teaching those who have recently learnt to read and write in Roman script
   6.6.3. Teaching those who have already learnt to read and write in non-Roman script
6.7 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Appendix G
Appendix H
Goals

The main aim of this Unit is to explore the role that literacy plays in the YL foreign language classroom and how the reading and writing skills can best be developed with Young Learners.

By the end of the Unit, you should be able to:

• Describe how and when children are introduced to reading and writing in L1 in your context and establish relevant links between acquiring literacy in L1 and the development of reading and writing in L2
• Explore potential problem areas when teaching reading and writing in the YL ELT classroom and speculate on the causes for these
• Develop your own approach to the teaching of literacy skills in the YL classroom in the light of theories introduced in earlier units and research findings.

Reading

Core reading


Recommended reading


6.1 Introduction

This unit starts with the exploration of your and other professionals’ views about young learners’ literacy in EFL. This will be followed by a brief overview of some of the major factors affecting children becoming literate in their first language and by a reflection on how these factors can inform the L2 context. The unit also considers reasons for teaching reading and writing in the YL classroom and classroom activities designed to develop the two skills. We end with a brief look at learners who may have a different writing system and special considerations that need to be taken into account when teaching them.

Although there are several types of literacy, such as numeracy, oral literacy and computer literacy, here I will concentrate on the one that affects us most as teachers of English – the term literacy in this unit refers to the ability to read and write so that people can function at a basic level in their context. Ensuring that the whole population has access to acquiring such literacy skills has over the years become increasingly more fundamental in the definition of a country’s development. One of the significant ways used to measure and broadcast a country’s rate of development is to identify the population’s literacy rate: in some countries, the official literacy rate may be as high as 100% while in others it will be much lower. The de facto rate may be somewhat different as it depends on the definition of literacy: is it simply the ability to write your name, read basic information or are those who are literate supposed to be able to cope with more complex reading and writing tasks? For instance, although as many as 50,000 characters have been identified in Chinese, only 2,000 characters are needed for basic literacy in modern China (Crystal, 1987).

An introductory task will make you aware of where you stand about reading and writing with young learners of English. Your response will be used later in the Unit.

**Task 1**

Answer the following:

How would you respond to the following statements representing rather common views among teachers especially in FL contexts?

*Reading and writing what has been learnt orally contributes to language*
reinforcement.

Children should not see the written form of words before acquiring their correct pronunciation.

Children transfer literacy skills form L1 to L2.

Children don’t transfer literacy skills form L1 to L2.

Reading and writing interferes with the acquisition of correct pronunciation.

Young learners experience reading and writing as ways to learn other subjects and therefore they expect to read and write when learning a FL.

Oral lessons are too heavy for young learners and writing may contribute to relaxing the tension due to prolonged listening.

For children who can read and write in their L1, reading and writing in English is sometimes easier than listening and speaking.

Writing gives children a sense of achievement and something tangible to show as proof of their progress.

Reading aloud helps pronunciation.

Young learners need to learn reading and writing because secondary teachers expect they can read and write.

The introduction of reading and writing should be delayed until learners have fully mastered at least some basic oral language.

Reading should be silent reading as reading aloud is a specific skill that not everybody needs.

Copying helps children improve accuracy.

6.2 The role of the written word in today’s world

The importance of the written word is well-documented and does not need to be defended although, it is, of course, important to remember that not all cultures experience an equal reverence for the printed word:
The use of language primarily and predominantly involves making noises with our speech organs and receiving other people’s speech noises through our ears. It is not a necessary condition of a language’s existence that it should have a written form or indeed any form other than talk. All natural languages had a very long history as solely speech before they were ever written down or became associated with rules of spelling and punctuation. Many languages exist in the world today which have still never been written down. (Quirk & Stein, 1990: 6)

Nevertheless, in the last century, literacy skills have become increasingly important. Learning to read and write is a process that usually begins at quite an early age. Often, children are taught these skills in their first year of primary school and the rest of their education relies on this competence which is the basis for all further academic progress (Jones, 1990; Collier 1995; Snow et al, 1999). Those children who struggle with the initial process, such as dyslexic children, may find their progress through mainstream education somewhat hampered (Wood, 1988; Jones, 1990).

In discussing the acquisition of literacy, Tough (1985) provides an original comparison between the skills involved in reading and writing and the symbolic use of objects that children do spontaneously during play.

The basic skill needed for learning to read is using one thing to represent another; that is, using symbols. All normal children are able to do this to some extent. They use a stick to represent a horse and pretend to ride on, or they make lines on paper and identify them with a man or a dog or a bus. But reading and writing demand more than the use of symbols; these skills are dependent on the child representing objects, actions and events by the system of signs that constitutes language, and then by representing these signs – that is, the articulated patterns of sounds, by a further system of signs – that is, by written or printed characters arranged in particular order and ruled by the conventions of punctuation... When learning to read, a child learns to represent one set of signs with another, the spoken with the written word. (Tough 1985: 197 – 198)

There is much anecdotal evidence in literature describing the excitement of individuals when they suddenly make the connection between letters and/or words and sounds. You may have felt it yourself. But what are the purposes of literacy, besides learning to read and write? Wood (1988), summarising Vygotsky’s views, has this to say:

In becoming literate, children do not simply learn ‘another way’ of communicating or a new ‘code’ for representing speech. Rather, writing and reading make novel demands on children and involve them in learning how to exploit new functions of language. Text is not simply speech written down, nor is writing merely the substitution of visible symbols for acoustic ones. Both reading and writing involve
ways of communicating that transform the nature of children’s knowledge of language and lead to more analytical ways of thinking. Wood (ibid: 161-2).

Baker (2001) develops this view of literacy further, focusing on the socio-cultural nature of literacy when he states that literacy is not only the acquisition of skills and the ability to construct meaning but also the means to acquire entry to the socio-cultural context. Manguel, 1997: 71) links this ability to reading in particular:

*In every literate society, learning to read is something of an initiation, a ritualized passage out of a state of dependency and rudimentary communication. The child learning to read is admitted into the communal memory by way of books, and thereby becomes acquainted with a common past which he or she renews, to a greater or lesser degree, in every reading.*

Those who do not go through this ‘rite of passage’ into their community may be treated differently and may be marginalised to some extent – they may lack the skills which are required to participate in the community fully. Illiterate adults may find it difficult to find work which offers a good salary and will often struggle to support their own children’s literacy development.

To recap, in the process of becoming literate, the child acquires the basic technical skills of reading and writing but is also introduced to a cultural community with a sense of its history, knowledge of its traditions, myths and customs, etc. Baker (2001: 329) quotes an extract from a book where Hirsch (1988) has listed ‘what every American needs to know’ to be culturally literate – this consists of 5000 items! However, as Baker points out, this list reflects only *some* aspects of American society and does not fully reflect the diversity of experiences of being American. The definition of literacy will, therefore, vary according to specific contexts and according to those doing the defining.

Bilingual children are an interesting case to consider in terms of literacy development. However, so many children are bilingual in the twenty first century and in so many different contexts that it is difficult to make any generalisations about them. For example, many children grow up speaking one language at home and another at school and perhaps a third or fourth in other contexts. Others will have two home languages. In many cases, children will develop reading and writing skills in one language but not in another. However, their oral literacy skills may be stronger in the other language. While integration into the host community may depend on the child developing literacy skills in the dominant language, they may not need these skills to function in their local community and so they may not value these skills (see Scott, 1991; Dunn, 1991; Baker, 2001, Creese, 2005 for issues pertinent to bilingual children). However, those bilinguals who can read in more than one
language will have access to cultural and linguistic input, unadulterated by translation or interpretation by others – thus, opening the reader up to a closer relationship with that language and the communities that speak it.

Literacy is, therefore, an extremely complex notion and one that goes beyond the simple ability to read and write (see Baker, 2001 for a fuller discussion). There is anecdotal evidence that children are also aware of its complexity. Lucy, a six year old, was in the second month of her first year at primary school and was beginning to read and write. One day one of her parents’ friends asked her if she could write. Her answer was “no”. Her older sister got into the conversation and said: “Why do you say so? You write when you do your homework”. Lucy sustained her previous position with this argument: “that’s not real writing!”.

6.3 Children becoming literate in their own language

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<tr>
<th>TASK 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spend some time finding out about the current favoured approach for introducing literacy to the children in your context. Try and identify areas such as:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is the official national policy in your context?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• At what age are children first introduced to reading and writing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are the two skills introduced simultaneously?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What approaches are used to introducing the two skills?</td>
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Just as there are different ways of perceiving literacy, there are many different approaches to the teaching of literacy. It seems that every few years, a different approach to teaching reading and writing gains favour. As has been argued with teaching a foreign language, most methods work – some may be faster, more suited to one type of student rather than another, more fulfilling – but, on the whole, most appear to be effective in some way. The selection of an approach usually springs from different practices, cultures and the limitations imposed by the language itself and are often founded on current educational beliefs about learning.

In the debate about the acquisition of L1 literacy there has always been a pendulum swing between whole language approaches and phonics methods, the former relying mainly on meaning and the latter on the teaching of the sounds that the letters of the alphabet represent. Both ways seem to have both advantages and disadvantages and the present trend in many countries is towards a combination of top-down and bottom-up activities. A full description of the rationale for a blended approach and practical suggestions about how to implement it are found in Vukelich and others (2007).

Written by Paula de Nagy
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
Cameron (2001: 123) highlights how literacy is both social and cognitive as it is a way for people “to share meanings across space and time” and “requires that individuals use specific skills and knowledge about how the written language operates in processing text… Amongst other things, readers and writers need to recognize individual letters, know how syllables make up words, use information from the whole text and context. What makes for successful literacy is the integration of information from each of these processes in the larger process of making sense of written text.”

If you are teaching in a part of the world where the writing system consists of ideograms, for example in China, children’s experience of becoming literate in L1 will, of course, be very different from that of becoming literate in English. So approaches for introducing L1 may be extremely different from the ones discussed above.

Reading and writing are not necessarily taught simultaneously in all countries and contexts. Age, the language itself, and other factors may dictate one approach as opposed to another. The reading/writing processes are naturally linked, as they are both dependent on the written word, but they may be acquired separately (see Jones 1990 for a brief discussion of this). The child who has been read to from an early age is aware that the written word carries meaning but may not discover until later that they too can learn to ‘create’ words on paper. Later in the same text, Jones suggests the following:

The acquisition of writing may (also) be affected by cultural differences, such as the age at which children start school. It may be that delaying school entry until six years, or even later, allows children who have reached advanced levels of mental competence and metalinguistic ability to experiment with writing, and produce hypotheses about written language, which young children at school bypass. (Jones, 1990: 103).

If you are interested in a concrete example of national language education objectives, you may like to visit the website for The National Curriculum for England (at www.nc.uk.net). If you can get access to it, you may wish to download it and consider which of the reading and writing strategies listed for L1 literacy development are applicable to your local context.

6.4 Becoming literate in English as a second or foreign language

The role of English in today’s world (See Unit 1) makes us well aware of the heavy demands of literacy skills in English, also on people using it as an international language; it is arguable that when today’s children become teenagers and adults they
will have to access a vast literature in English with reference to their jobs and, may be, leisure interests. They will be expected to be able to write a variety of texts in English as, for example, curricula and reports. Their English literacy skills will probably be highly connected to the full exploitation of information technologies as a lot of their reading will be on the web and a lot of their writing will consist of messages and other texts delivered from their computer terminals.

By teaching young learners to read and write in English, be it a second or foreign language, we are opening up avenues for further exploration, giving them extra tools which they can exercise throughout their education and life in general. The purpose is the same as with mother-tongue literacy. The main difference is that the process of learning those skills in English may be slower and more gradual than in their native language. Task 2 will introduce you to a reflection on the relationship between L1 and L2 literacy in different contexts.

**Task 3**

Answer the following questions and, if possible, provide examples to support your views.

- What is the relationship between L1 and L2 literacy?
- Are there any differences between bilingual contexts and contexts where English is a foreign language?

A difference between the two contexts mentioned in Task 3 is that a child in a bilingual context may, sometimes, be in a position of becoming literate in English without any previous formal literacy in his/her native language; while in the FL classroom learners are asked to write in English when they “can write” in L1; of course “can” here is used as a general term and implies at least being physically able to write. There is less caution about reading in L2 and even five or six year olds may be exposed to some basic forms of reading (example: just learning to read a few words in the course-book or from a card) when they are in the process of just beginning to read in their own language.

The relationship between literacy in L1 and L2 in bilingual contexts has been extensively studied (see Tough, 1985; Hudelson, 1989; Franklin, 1999; Baker, 2001). What Hudelson (1989) says about children learning to write in English as a second language might provide valuable insights also for the FL class. Her view, supported by research, is that children that are literate in their L1 have developed an experience that would sustain the development of L2 literacy. “Native language writing experiences help learners understand what writing is and what writing can do. Learners develop a sense of how to create meaning and of the various functions
of or purposes for writing” (Hudelson 1989: 38). She also gives examples of the strategies that children use and of the hypotheses that they make in their efforts to read and write in English such as, for instance, that English functions as their native language in the relationship between spelling and pronunciation. These strategies and examples are sometimes observable also in classes of English as a foreign language.

A more problematic perspective is identified by Jannuzi (1998) who says:

*Although it is a given in TESL and TEFL that our students’ spoken native languages are going to have an effect on their abilities with English (e.g. interference or negative transfer in phonology, grammar, vocabulary use etc.), it is striking how little consideration is given to the importance of native writing systems, especially since we so often take (and often take wrongly) as a given a sort of universal literacy that is supposed to result from being a native speaker of a language. As teachers we presuppose in our students an orientation to the written text as a useful language learning tool: how many teachers try to teach a SL/FL without written texts?*

Before going further, do Task 4, which is focused on the features of literacy skills in English. It is a reflection on what adults, especially if native speakers, know unconsciously. But once in a while it is not so bad to wear our young learners’ shoes!

### Task 4

Read Cameron (2001), pages 124 – 136 and take note of what, in your opinion and according to your experience, is relevant for young learners for whom English is not the mother tongue.

Are there any aspects that create obstacles to the acquisition of literacy for this group of learners?

At this point I would like to go back to Baker (2001) to explore the similarities and differences in acquiring L1 and L2. When discussing literacy in general, he outlines two types of classroom: “Functional Literacy/Transmission Classrooms” and “Critical Literacy Classrooms” (ibid: 339). In Baker’s view, the first type of classroom looks primarily at getting it right: literacy in these classrooms consists of tasks which are accuracy-based: working through exercises, spelling correctly, doing tests – in short, being correct. The second type of classroom is more child-centred and literacy is seen as a means to becoming a fuller human being: it is a means of
giving reflection time, of opportunities for being creative and for acquiring life skills – echoing the social constructivist model discussed earlier in the Module (see too Williams & Burden 1997, Nystrand, 1997, and Mercer, 2004). Some of the characteristics of the “critical Literacy Classroom” described by Baker are very demanding and children need a good level of English in order to fully benefit.

**TASK 5**

Read Baker’s lists in Appendix A. Which of the activities he describes would you consider realistically feasible in L2 with the 5/8 age group? Which with the 9/12 age group? Is there a place for critical literacy in the L2 classroom?

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**6. 5 Reading and Writing in English in the YL classroom**

In the previous sections we have highlighted the role of the written word in today’s world and focused on how literacy has the same functions in any language. Written text in the L2 has other functions for the learner, however. It is a source of cultural knowledge, of authentic language in use and of linguistic input.

In considering reading and writing in English however, we should realistically accept that the learners’ level of competence in these skills will be highly influenced by their general competence in English. Task 6 will help you to reflect on the factors influencing the acquisition of literacy skills in a second or foreign language.

**Task 6**

Cameron (2001: 134) identifies four factors influencing the learning of reading and writing in L2, particularly: “the nature of the written forms of the first language; the learner’s previous experience in L1 literacy; the learner’s knowledge of the FL, the learner’s age.”

Can you give examples from your experience with young learners confirming (or disconfirming) her perspective?

While as language teachers we may consider the first and third points made above of greatest importance, we should not underestimate the second. The effect of previous experience on L2 literacy is generally positive when children have been successful in this respect in their own language, but it could cause difficulties for the children who are below average standards for their age. Problems in reading and writing in L1 may arise for cognitive or physical reasons but social or affective factors can also play their part. Working with the oral/aural aspect of a foreign language can help low
achieving learners to a positive learning experience, although care should be taken to avoid putting them off with reading or writing tasks they cannot cope with.

The following task will lead you to a more detailed analysis of the factors that influence young learners’ abilities to cope with the written skills.

**Task 7**

In Appendix B you will find two texts on basic principles to foster reading and writing. They are on the same wavelength although they focus on different aspects. Choose the three principles that you would consider as most relevant for the young learners’ classroom and give reasons for your choice. How might they be put into practice? Provide examples.

We cannot know which ones you have considered as the most important but we would like to pick some out for discussion. Although principle 2 from Appendix B1 is hardly revolutionary, it’s worth underlining its importance as we might even go as far as to say that motivation is the key to successful language learning at any age. We would also choose 8 and 9 from Appendix B2. How do they relate to your experience? Teachers sometimes expect that learners “get it right” the first time and do not consider opportunities for revision and editing and their response is sometimes limited to correcting mistakes. And with reference to reading, you may know from your experience that, although it can become a great pleasure, it is not automatic that all children will learn to read easily and will enjoy this activity. Moreover, in both reading and writing there may be a need to mediate traditional school practices and materials especially for children having literacy difficulties. Reading and writing experiences for this group of learners should contain the appropriate level of challenge and the necessary support so that children can learn something new without being overwhelmed by demands beyond their capabilities. Remember the role of scaffolding as described in the previous units!

Principle 4 from B1 and 4 and 5 from B2 could mitigate Perera’s three factors that make reading difficult:

- written texts do not always come accompanied with non-linguistic features to back up the message, so the reader is left alone to interpret the message;
- many written texts are written in a style that is substantially different from everyday speech;
- written language does not come accompanied with prosodic features which help the listener to further interpret and structure texts – the reader has to ‘hold the developing text rather carefully in memory so that they can identify the
information focus even when it does not occur in its most usual position at the end of a clause’ (Perera 1984: 273).

Kuhiwczak (1999) shows how working with children’s literature might be a way of putting into practice many of the principles described in Appendix B and we suggest you read that chapter now, if you haven’t already done so.

To conclude this section we would like to suggest that the acquisition of reading and writing skills in L2 is facilitated by exploiting all five senses. What is more, harnessing students’ range of intelligences, not only cognitive intelligence (Gardener, 1993) may well support the development of text skills. A varied and rich curriculum that encourages multiple ways of knowing, learning, and expressing content helps support the language and literacy development of learners. Franklin (1999) reports on studies following this approach and provides many suggestions for classroom activities in this vein. Besides, reading and writing are perceived as more friendly when they are part of projects including the four skills in an integrated and purposeful way and then come as natural phases in a complete process.

6.5.1 Reading Activities

Different course books offer different opportunities for reading, ranging from the reading necessary to complete exercises to experiences of ‘authentic’ reading, where learners construct meaning, using grapho-phonetic, syntactic, and semantic cues and their own personal experience and knowledge of the world. Teachers can also extend their learners’ opportunities for reading in many ways.

Task 8

Make a list if reading activities that you consider suitable for the 5/7 age group.

Make a list if reading activities that you consider suitable for older learners.

Compare your lists with that in Appendix C.

An apparent incongruence in teaching reading is the fact that a very personal, individual and silent activity becomes a group activity with learners mostly reading the same text at the same time and at the same pace. Reading times in which everybody in the room, including the teacher, reads whatever they wish with no tasks and a reading corner where learners can go and explore books in ‘empty’ moments could be a solution to this difficulty. However as the aim of the classroom is not so much to reproduce out of class contexts but to create the conditions for learners to
learn how to cope with these contexts, the importance of teaching reading strategies should not be underestimated.

Learners may well have already been taught reading skills such as skimming and scanning in L1 and using these strategies also in L2 might have a positive influence on their reading skills in any language. Probably this would happen more easily when learners are helped to become aware of the relationship between L1 and L2 reading. Wouldn’t this make an intriguing research project?

Curtain and Pesola (1994:125) stress the need for readers to use conceptual frameworks or “schemata” when interpreting a text – YLs will need teachers to help them to activate this background information and then bring it to the text so that they have help with interpreting the text. Such schemata might be: knowledge of how stories start, knowledge of a topic, etc. Frequently, in the FL classroom, reading of texts will be simultaneous with listening to the text. This can help learners to see the relationship between the pronunciation of words and phrases and their written form, while the prosody of the spoken version (such things as intonation and stress) can also help learners with meaning. A spoken version can be particularly helpful for children struggling to read.

Usually, by the time children have become more confident readers in their own language, they require less help in the ELT classroom too (Curtain & Pesola 1994:126). Van Deusen-MacLeod (2001) reports Holdway’s (1979) four reading processes that summarize a child’s development of the reading skill. The first is the observation of reading behaviour as, for example, listening to teacher or adult reading or watching an adult read. The second is collaboration with the teacher or peers and involves experimenting with reading with the support of another person. The third is reading independently using the strategies learnt in the second stage. The fourth requires learners to share what they have learnt from their reading in a variety of ways.

Reading can be the either the starting point or the conclusion of a series of oral activities and the British Council Project “Magic Pencil” is a rich resource of creative oral and reading activities for young learners of different ages and for beginners too. An example of how reading can contribute to general language learning is found in Neyman (2002) although this research has the limitation of reporting an experience in the context of private tuition.

6.5.2 Writing Activities

Sometimes described as the ‘neglected’ skill, writing has received a new lease of life through the focus on process writing where the process leading to the production of text is given as much or even more emphasis as the final product. However, even
in their own language, there are some children who will always be reluctant writers. Rosen & Rosen (1973:85) paint a fairly gloomy picture of children being asked to write in their mother-tongue, with children failing to see what the overall purpose is for doing something which is so ‘difficult’. They are not the only writers to illustrate the frustrations of learning to write for children and you may have experienced this yourself as a learner or as a teacher. We’d like to briefly outline some of the reasons why writing can, however, be a very satisfying skill for children to develop in the YL classroom:

- in a literate society the written word carries much value and children’s life chances can be enhanced by learning to write in a second language, particularly, at the moment, English.
- Writing can help learners on a number of different levels. For example, writing may provide children with an opportunity to work at a slower pace – the pace in a YL classroom tends to be fairly fast to cater for children’s high levels of energy, but through individual writing activities YLs can have some quieter, thinking time. In addition, teachers are often freer to interact with individual students during writing activities – the children thus get some personal attention. Another aspect may be the enjoyment that comes from putting pen to paper, the creative process leading to a pleasing product which can then be displayed and enjoyed by all; lastly, writing is often an aid to memory – there are learners who find that having written a word down, this helps them recall and retrieve it more easily. Not all these points will be relevant to all learners and there are many more reasons why writing is helpful for the language learners.
- Parents usually consider writing to be important. It is, of course, an ‘assessable’ skill: children can be seen to make progress and the whole family and community can ‘see’ what is being done. Young children learning English tend to welcome homework – by being asked to write something at home, they can ‘show’ those interested in their progress what they are learning and their contact with English is also encouraged to continue outside the classroom.

Kroll (1981) outlines four phases in the acquisition of the writing ability. These can further help us consider the role of writing in the ELT classroom. The stages are:

- Preparation, where the mechanisms of putting pen to paper are learnt and spelling is a focus (of course, this can be a particular challenge for children whose L1 script is non-Roman);
- Consolidation, where children write what they can already say;
- Differentiation, where writing and speech begin to separate – the children are now aware that the written word is different from the spoken word; and
- Integration, where the writer has total control of the written form and expresses their own ‘voice’ with confidence. (Perera 1984:207-208)
TASK 9

Look at a course book for young learners and consider some of the writing activities available at various stages of the course; how far could they be ascribed to one of the stages described by Kroll?

The pupil’s books accompanying course books are often the first experience of writing in English that young learners have. Much of this writing takes place in the context of exercises such as gap filling, answering questions, filling grids, matching etc. In these cases, learners have to contribute individual words or sentences. Other activities require what could be called ‘selective copying’, that is the learners choose the correct word or phrase and then copy it down. Examples would be giving pairs of sentences and asking learners to copy the ones describing a series of pictures or giving a series of things to wear and asking learners to copy those suitable for a holiday to the sea-side etc. The advantage of selective copying is that children practise writing in a sheltered situation but it is not wholly mechanical: there is a cognitive element and a choice.

Also in the case of writing the teacher can extend the opportunities far beyond what is generally found in the course book and progressively introduce learners to the construction of short texts. In her discussion on children’s writing in ESL, Hudelson (1989) follows Berthoff’s (1981) approach and sees writing as “creating meaning from one’s own intellectual and linguistic resources and activity, rather than the copying of someone’s else text, or the use of prepared lists to create sentences or stories” (ibid: 5). Task 10 will get you to identify activities in this mode.

Task 10

Make a list of writing activities which are not “exercises” but which you would consider feasible with young learners in an EFL context. Consider the 8/12 age group in particular.

Compare your list with that in Appendix D.

In discussing writing in the FL classroom there is a tendency to refer to guided or parallel writing and free writing. The former consists of the extended use of a model to write something new, and is product focused. The text in Appendix E has been successfully used for this activity in primary classes.
More has to be said about free writing. Some adult learners are reluctant to let loose their creative bent in the classroom but YLs often embrace opportunities to be creative in a foreign language. The extraordinary capacity that some children have to create can be a real surprise (See Moon, 2005: 31-46) as long as children have some help in acquiring the writing tools they require. (For examples see Appendix F). These include: a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary, some awareness of English coherence and cohesion strategies, an awareness of spelling, punctuation, register and some awareness of English syntax. Process writing lessons where the learners spend a long time drafting and redrafting their work, often in a collaborative format and with the teacher playing primarily a supportive role, can be a useful process to follow when learners engage in free writing. This may of course be due to scaffolding.

It is also possible to do most of the drafting onto a word processor (if these are available). Very young children will be set tasks where the writing may be combined with drawings and where each child may, for example, produce only one sentence of a story (see Jarvis 2000). Older children, however (11 to 12 year olds), can produce fairly complex texts and may really enjoy the opportunities for fluent expression that free writing activities allow.

The following quote from Curtain & Pesola can also provide teachers with useful guidelines for selecting and designing writing activities:

Successful writing activities provide:
- a framework of linguistic structure
- outlets that allow for self-expression, creativity; the student’s writing extends beyond the model
- realistic, reliable, appropriate, and understandable products.
Curtain & Pesola (1994:135)

**TASK 11**

See Appendix G. For this task, analyse the four texts written by YLs, and consider the following:

- What is the genre of each example? E.g. narrative/biography/review.
- What opportunities for language development does each genre seem to provide? E.g. developing ideas, extending clause structure.
- Speculate on what kind of preparatory work the teacher might have had to do to help these children produce such work. E.g. analysing guided models.

**6. 5 Further considerations on reading and writing**
6.5.1 The issue of accuracy

It is a major feature of writing that one’s errors can seem more apparent than in the other so-called ‘productive’ skill: speaking. Some children can be put off by this: no matter how much they practise, what they produce is full of spelling mistakes or incorrect sentences. Also, they may find it difficult to write neatly. How the teacher provides feedback will be greatly influential. Different institutions tend to have their own rules about the importance of accuracy and neatness. Some schools will promote fluency and communicability while others will consider accuracy and neatness as more important (as we saw in Baker’s list, Appendix A). Ideally, of course, all of these aims would be achieved but it is important to remember that there are different stages in the writing process and that children who are unable to write neatly or correctly still have something to communicate. Responding to the product only with overly high demands may simply put these children off writing and develop in them a reluctance to put pen to paper.

It certainly helps if children know what is expected of them: for example accuracy and neatness in a copying exercise, or communication and vocabulary in a free writing task. Curtain and Pesola (1994:136) talk about the importance of awareness of audience for their writing; when children are preparing drafts of their writing for ‘publication’ for an outside audience they generally try harder to be neat and accurate. Hudelson (1989) insists on the motivating effect of writing to communicate something to a reader and reports various experiences of teachers responding to the content of children’s diaries and giving indirect linguistic feedback through rewording or extending what the children had written. Cards addressed to real people, class magazines,” books” to exchange with other classes (de Andrès, 2001), emails and letters to real people, a page for the school web-site, the presentation of one’s village or town for visitors are all examples of this kind of writing and develop both fluency and accuracy. They will involve more organizational work for the teacher but they are worthwhile (For examples see Appendix H).

In Unit 10, we will be examining the issue of assessment and evaluation but it is of interest here to briefly consider how we can assess children’s writing. Moon (2005:33 - 40) in a discussion of children developing writing skills in L2, identifies four different implications from her case-studies. Firstly, she feels that teachers need to accept that writing is a complex skill with two different dimensions: product with linguistic, textual and interpersonal (audience awareness) features, as well as process where revising, planning and composing are major features. Secondly, Moon advocates the need for teachers to welcome error as evidence of learning and to see learning as a process – the product, thus, becomes less important as there will be further opportunities for improvement. Thirdly, different children demonstrate varying abilities for different tasks within the same class – teachers, therefore, cannot evaluate only in terms of one standard and need to set a series of different texts across
a number of genres to get a full picture of any one learner. Lastly, Moon stresses the teacher’s need to identify their own beliefs about writing and to ensure that this is reflected in their approach to correction and feedback – if the teacher perceives linguistic accuracy to be of primary importance, so will the children. You may wish to briefly consider these four findings in the light of your beliefs about writing in the YL classroom.

6.5.2 Teaching English to those who have recently learnt to read and write in Roman script

When introducing children to reading and writing in the ELT classroom, teachers need to work carefully to ensure that the experience is a positive one. Learning to speak in your mother-tongue is usually done informally and by the time children are five or six, they need little formal help in this area. However, reading and writing usually need to be taught formally and “…teachers spend a great deal of time and effort on teaching reading and writing – and, even so, many pupils fail to become fully literate.” (Perera 1984:160) The main reason for this is that these are two skills that ‘don’t come naturally’ – they require specific strategies.

Reading and writing in the early stages are, thus, fairly complex activities and different children will have different rates of progress. Not all children enjoy these activities, particularly if there has been an excessive focus on ‘getting it right’ as described by Baker (1996) earlier. Children, therefore, may come into the ELT classroom with an already developed love or hate of reading and writing. Their past successes or failures in these areas in L1 are bound to be carried over into the L2 and it is important not to compound any feeling of failure and to build on the feelings of success.

Children who have recently begun to read and write will probably still be doing so quite slowly in their own language. In English, this is bound to be even slower. They may now be confronted with a different way of forming and recognising letters (cursive or joined up writing vs. printing); may need to take on board new letters – e.g. K does not exist in all languages – and will need to come to terms with the vagaries of English sound/spelling relationships.

6.5.3. Teaching those who have already learnt to read and write in non-Roman script

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<td>What is the situation in your context? Do the children you teach have a non-Roman</td>
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</table>
The difficulties of learning to write in your own language are clear. While many other skills are mental processes, writing is a very physical activity although also grounded in mental processes. When writing, we interact with pen and paper – we need to find a position to hold the pen so that it is comfortable and allows us to move along the page in a certain direction to produce text – text which we gradually learn to organise to produce different messages. As has already been mentioned, learning to write can take a long time and for some people, will always be a difficult process. Children may take quite a while before they are fluent and confident ‘shapers’ of their own writing system – in other words, before they have reached a stage in which they can write legibly in their own language.

When a child begins to learn to read and write in their L1 environment, they already speak the language – they are already competent communicators. In addition, if they’re lucky, their parents will have read to them from an early age (there is much evidence to support the importance of this in successful acquisition of literacy: see e.g. Soares 2000; Wood 1988). Contrast this with the child who is fluent in one language and knows one script and now needs to acquire both in a new language altogether. This is why starting reading and writing in L2 at a later stage is probably advisable.

For children who write in a different script, the complexities of learning a foreign language are compounded with learning to function in a new script. As with very young children, ELT teachers will probably want to wait until the child has reached some degree of confident use in their own script. It is then advisable to introduce the child to the English alphabet. This time, however, the child is not going to simply learn new names and sounds for mostly familiar letters – the letters, themselves, are all new and have to be learnt as new shapes/symbols that convey sounds which when put together convey meaning. When teaching these children, teachers are virtually in the same situation as those L1 teachers teaching literacy. Motor-skills are again important and shapes, i.e. letters, need to be related to sounds which in turn will lead to meanings. The main difference with L1 literacy work is that the children in this case, may not have any familiarity with the sounds of the English language. To help children become more confident with writing, many course books aimed at the first year of English now come with alphabet books or the like, where children’s eye/hand co-ordination is practised and they are given practice in printing letters.

One possible strategy for teaching children in this context is to give more emphasis to the oral/aural components of language learning in the first stages of the course, and only subsequently to move on to the written word. The written word can be used simultaneously – an apple being illustrated, for example, through a picture but with the word written underneath, but it is probably advisable to expect little written
production of the word until some specific work has been done with the students on shaping the letters. This may involve copying letters and words – hopefully in a meaningful context. However, we need to accept that the rate of progress may be slower than with children with a Roman script background and the course design and selection of materials need to take into account the specific needs of the children’s background.

It is, however, important to stress that while ELT teachers should consider the case of non-Roman script background children carefully, this is not an insurmountable problem. Huss (1995:772), in a small-scale study of Punjabi speaking children in northern England, found that the children who were learning Koranic Arabic and/or Urdu at their mosque school or at home made use of these other language learning experiences to support their reading and writing in English. In this particular study, the teacher did not particularly encourage these connections but the children independently came to the conclusions that their various learning experiences could benefit them. This seems to support the discussion by Williams & Burden (1997:68-79) of Feuerstein’s factors concerned with taking control of learning. In addition, the children in the Huss study ‘...were active literacy learners who used both adults and peers, as not only literary models, but also as literacy mentors or resources’. (Huss 1995:772). This study is a good reminder that Young Learners are not simply passive recipients in the teaching process but, as we have seen in previous units, their involvement and input will, to a large extent, determine the success of the learning process.

Smith, (1996) provides a rich overview of reading theories and then describes how to teach reading to children, whose alphabet is not Roman and how to sustain their efforts both cognitively and affectively.

6.7 Looking ahead

Some of the key considerations to take into account of when teaching reading and writing in the YL ELT classroom thus seem to be:

- Most children who come from an environment where reading and writing are highly valued tend to find acquiring literacy easier.
- Most YL language teachers initially give more prominence to the oral/aural skills and these tend to be the only skills dealt with until the children have learnt to read and write in their own language;
- Children who are ready to read and write in English have, usually, already learnt or are learning the conventions of the two skills in their own language, for example, how to recognise and form letters, punctuation, sentences, paragraphs, etc. ELT teachers can use this to their benefit but it is not automatic that these conventions are the same in the two languages. Fromkin & Rodman (1993:377) point out that certain languages don’t separate morphemes
or words. Teachers need to be well-informed about their learners’ mother-tongues;

- Reading helps to extend learners’ linguistic range as well as helping them to acquire cultural awareness of the target language;
- The ultimate aim of writing is to provide learners with a communicative tool in the foreign language. Writing can also help them in the learning process by, for example, providing an opportunity for slower production of language, thus giving students a chance to reflect on the language itself;
- YLs, particularly after a certain age, may not enjoy reading and writing in their own language. They are bound to carry these feelings into the ELT classroom, so they will need motivating and engaging activities.

How do the above match with what you found out doing Task 1? With reference to the previous list of key points and to the reading and reflection you have been involved in while working with this unit, to what extent has your attitude to young learners’ literacy changed? Are there any things you would like to try with your groups of learners?

If you are interested in exploring the topic of this Unit more deeply, this is a vast research area. Are there any aspects of English literacy that seem to be particularly problematic with young learners in your context? How do YLs in your context respond to reading and writing in English? How do the curriculum requirements about reading and writing relate to your favourite approach?

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**Appendix A**

**From** Baker (2001) Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism: 339

**Functional Literacy/Transmission Classrooms**

1. Literacy is getting the correct answers on worksheets, filling in blanks, circling appropriate answers.
2. Literacy is answering closed questions having read a story.
3. Literacy is reading words, sometimes without understanding their meaning.
4. Literacy is reading aloud to the teacher and the rest of the class, being perfect in pronunciation, intonation and accent.
5. Literacy is spelling words correctly, and writing in correct grammar.
6. Literacy is mechanically going through exercises, practicing skills, and giving correct answers on tests.
7. Literacy is learning to do but not necessarily to think.

**Critical Literacy Classrooms**

1. Literacy is seeing oneself as an active reader and writer.
2. Literacy involves enjoying reading, developing independent thoughts and judgements about reading and writing.
3. Literacy is sharing ideas, reflections, experiences and reactions with others in the classroom, both peers and teachers.
4. Literacy is gaining insights into oneself, one’s life in the family and the community, into social and political control, the use of print and other mass media to inform, persuade and influence so as to maintain the status quo.
5. Literacy is about understanding the power relationships that lie behind reading and writing.
6. Literacy is about constructing and reconstructing meaning, critically examining the range of meanings in the story and outside the story.
7. Literacy is active writing for various purposes and audiences, often to influence and assert.
8. Literacy is about developing consciousness, increased self-reflection, increased reflection about status, power, wealth and privilege in society.
9. Literacy is about developing critical thinking habits, creative imagination, and posing alternatives, some of which may be radical.
10. Literacy is about learning and interpreting the world, explaining, analyzing, arguing about and acting upon the world in which a person lives.

Appendix B

B.1 From Curtain and Pesola (1994) Language and Children Making the Match (pages 126 – 127)

Basic General Principles of Reading – Alma Fior Ada and Maria Pilar de Olave

1. Learning to read and write should be an extension of the process of learning to speak.
2. Children should be motivated. They will grasp more easily what has meaning and interest for them.
3. Reading to children and telling them stories will make them better readers.
4. Reading materials should be written in the clear and simple language children are familiar with.
5. Teaching of reading and writing should be done simultaneously.
6. There is a correlation between children’s oral language development and their reading ability.
7. Children learn to read more quickly and easily when there is a reason for doing so:
   • Exchanging letters with a friend
   • Mailbox in the classroom
   • Books authored by peers in the classroom library


1. Written language is acquired, as is oral language, through authentic and purposeful use rather than through a focus on the written language.
2. Reading is a process in which the reader constructs meaning, using the cuing of culture and experiences. Learners learn to read by being read to and by reading authentic texts of various kinds.
3. People read different kinds of materials for different purposes. These materials differ from each other in terms of content and in terms of structure. Young learners come to understand different text structures by interacting with varied texts.
4. Some kinds of reading materials are easier to read than others because of factors of predictability in them. What the reader already knows about the contents of a text has an impact on the meaning the reader constructs from the text.

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Revised by Rita Balbi
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5. Materials that are culturally and/or experientially familiar to the reader will be easier to understand than those not familiar.

6. Writing is a process in which the writer creates or constructs meaning using specific symbols. Writers write for different purposes, to different audiences, in varied forms.

7. Young learners can begin to write before they have the full control of the system of the language (both oral and written language). Writing involves the writer figuring out how the written language works through making and testing hypotheses.

8. Young learners learn to write by writing texts having meaning and purpose and by having others responding to them. Interaction with others who respond to the learners’ efforts is crucial to the development of writers.

9. Writing is a process and writers struggle with what they want to express; they draft, reconsider and revise before the writing gets to a final form. Revising is concerned with content and meaning while editing with form.

10. Writing is influenced by reading and good readers often become good writers.

Appendix C

Here is a list of possible types of reading in the young learners’ classroom

Learners read

- stories either collaboratively (with the teacher or peers) or individually – these may be published stories, stories written by other students, their own stories or stories written by the teacher.
- instructions so that they can make things, colour in, play games, etc
- exercises to match items, fill in gap-fills, complete sentences, etc.
- charts and cards with words and key sentences
- labels of products,
- birthday cards, Christmas cards, postcards etc.
- examples of environmental print
- texts of songs to sing
- poems and rhymes
- comics
- children’s magazines
- menus
- leaflets

at an older age

- dictionaries, timetables, maps, etc. where they exercise scanning, strategies;

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• texts on the internet or non-fiction books such as encyclopaedias to find out information for project work;
• pen-pal letters and emails so that they may reply to them
• and even language explanations as back–up to teacher-led presentations
• script of short plays

Appendix D

Here is a list of possible writing activities for the young learners’ classroom

• Birthday cards and cards for other occasions
• Invitations to class events (example. end of the year party)
• Rules for games
• Rules for classroom life
• Things to do at the various steps of cardboard games
• Letters and emails
• Presentation of their town or village
• Stories, poems and songs
• Bubbles for picture stories and comics
• Diary of special days or events
• Questionnaires and answers to questionnaires
• Results of class surveys
• Notes from a written text
• Messages
• Etc.

Appendix E

WHAT SMELLS? Story by Barbara Wasik, Success for All Foundation

What smells?
Flowers smell
Popcorn smells
Oranges smell
Cakes smell
Skunks smell
Socks smell
Phew!

Written by Paula de Nagy
Revised by Rita Balbi
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Appendix F

F1

After working on the topic of seasons, the children of a fourth primary class were asked to write a story taking place in one of the four seasons. One of the boys (Matteo) chose autumn. His text was then improved by the teacher and performed with puppets. For the original version see your Module Blackboard.

F2

After working on the topic of asked to write a story about Blackboard.

F3 and F4

Children taking part in a drama as cue to invent a story on a clo' Module Blackboard.
Appendix G

For G 1, G 2, G 3 and G4 see your module blackboard.

Appendix H

H1

This is a leaflet prepared by a fifth primary class of Istituto Comprensivo Cogoleto (Italy) to present their village to the partners of a Socrates Comenius Project. See your Module Blackboard.

H2

This is a poster prepared by a class of a primary school to present the local Palio to foreign visitors. The local administration paid for the printing of 100 copies to be exhibited in shops and other places. See your Module Blackboard.
DISCOVERING THE PARK

- SUN
- CLOUD
- BIRDS
- POND
- FROG
- DOG
- CAT
- TUBE
- SLIDE
- CHILDREN
- BUCKET
- ROUNDABOUT
- TRAIN
- BENCH
- STONE
- SAND POOL
- GRASE
- TREETES
- BUTTERFLY
- SNAIL
- FISH
- DUCK
- TURTLE
TYL Unit 7

Language in the YL Classroom

Content

Goals

Readings

7.1 Introduction
7.2 Language in the classroom
    7.2.1 How many languages?
    7.2.2 The ARC model
    7.2.3 Language in course books
7.3 Child Language but what model?
7.4 The Teacher’s role in developing L2
7.5 Looking ahead

References

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Goals

The main focus of this unit is to look more closely at the language used in the Young Learner classroom.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
• reflect on and evaluate the use of the first language(s) and the target language in the YL ELT context considering both teachers and learners
• analyse how ELT materials shape and influence language use in the YL classroom
• identify the rationale for different approaches to the use of the target language by teachers and analyse and evaluate your own.

Reading

Core reading

• **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P. Chapters 5 and 9.

Recommended reading

7.1 Introduction

This unit moves from the reflection on some key concepts about language learning focused in the previous units to explore their impact and the questions they pose with reference to the use of English in the young learners’ classroom. This preliminary phase is followed by a discussion on the use of L1 in this context and then by the analysis of the recording of one of your lessons and/or of other lessons if you are not teaching young learners at present. This hands-on experience will introduce us to consider the issue of code-switching and of the teacher’s role in the pursuit of a balance between language authenticity and language pedagogy. The final part will provide a discussion on a number of questions raised by the effort to identify the desirable quality and quantity of L2 exposure and production and an overview of the rationale behind different policies of language use.

In order to get started we begin with a task.

**Task 1**

Reflect on the following SLA principles and identify their implications for the use of English in the YL classroom:

- Learning is enhanced by a “relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom” (Williams and Burden: 48)

- The verbal environment influences language learning and the richness and frequency of exposure affect respectively the quality and rate of learning (Johnston, 2005)

- Language acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is a little more advanced than their level of competence (Krashen, 1993)
Children learn through interaction with adults supporting their learning with a variety of strategies (scaffolding) (Cameron, 2001)

When we are using our native language we are not conscious of the structures we are using to convey our meaning; repetition and practice help learners to acquire a similar automatic control of the target language (Brooks, 1964)

Children pick up languages easily (McGlothin, 1997)

“Every learning experience should be seen within the context of helping learners to develop a sense of personal identity and … it is important to provide optimum conditions for learning of an authentic nature to take place” (Williams and Burden, 1997: 36 – 37).

Some of the above statements seem to suggest an orientation towards the “only English” approach at least on the part of the teacher. Others are open to different interpretations: some judicious use of the native language may contribute to release tension and to create a “relaxed” atmosphere; some forms of scaffolding might be in L1; “optimum conditions for learning” does not say anything explicitly about the use of either language but it can be understood as a way to exploit them so that they both contribute to L2 learning. While some young ones may just be put off by an only English policy (See Appendix A), older learners (and, in my experience, especially boys) may perceive the prohibition of using L1 as a loss of identity and consequently develop negative feelings towards the L2 lesson. These are just preliminary observations that have the aim of pointing out the dichotomy existing between contrasting views, even when based on equally valid considerations such as, for example, the undeniable value of as much as possible exposure to the target language on the one hand and a positive role of L1 in learning L2 on the other. Besides it would be necessary to make a distinction between teacher and learners, input and output and consider the type of English learners are put in touch with and are asked to produce. The following sections will try to cover these aspects.

7.2 Language in the classroom

The first part of this section looks at language in the classroom from the perspective of “which language” and is focused on the analysis of data from one of your lessons with reference to various aspects of language use. The second part is concerned with the linguistic features of various ways of using L2, while in the final part we examine language in course books.
7.2.1 How many languages?

Task 2

Reflect on the following and answer:

- What is your attitude about the use of language in the YL ELT classroom?
- In your opinion and according to your experience what are the advantages and the disadvantages of the English only attitude? Consider teachers and learners.
- In your opinion and according to your experience what are the advantages and the disadvantages of the use of the first language? Consider teachers and learners.
- If you think that the learners’ first language should sometimes be used by the teacher, which of the following might you use the L1 for? Presentation of a new topic? Answering the learners’ questions? Giving instructions? Clarifying a language point? Management? Greetings and other social language? Disciplining? Assigning homework? Routines for starting and closing lessons? Talking about learning? Other?

A preliminary observation about the above is that the teacher may not know the learners’ first language and in this case obviously s/he cannot use it; if s/he is not a competent speaker of that language, s/he might not want to lose face speaking in a way that learners may find funny. However, with older learners, when appropriate, this situation might be exploited for a discussion on language learning. There are no clear cut answers about what to do in L1 and what in L2 provided it is done with understanding and effectively, but we will come back to this issue later in the unit.

A common phenomenon noticeable in the language classroom is code-switching that is alternation between L1 and L2 in a single utterance or in a stretch of discourse. This may happen to both teacher and learners even if the reasons may not always be the same for both. With reference to all situations and not just the classroom, Skiba (1997) with reference to Crystal identifies three reasons for code-switching:
1. Linguistic gap
2. Solidarity with a particular group
3. The use of a tool to create special communicative effects.

With reference to the classroom, Cameron (2001) highlights a particular case of the adaptive strategy, called “alignment” (ibid: 203) that takes place when the teacher uses L1 to convey to the pupils a sense of being on their side. Sert (2005) distinguishes between teachers and learners. In his view, when teachers switch to the learners’ native language they want to construct a bridge from “known (native language) to unknown (new foreign language content)” and in this way they exploit...
L1 to increase the learners’ understanding of L2. Eldridge (1996) reports about a research on code-switching with learners of the 11-13 age group in a Turkish school; his conclusion is that teachers should do as much as possible to encourage learners to speak more English in the classroom, however stopping or decreasing native language use “does not actually address the problem” (Eldridge, 1996: 311). Hancock (1997) examines the code-switching that goes on during group work with 14 – 17 year old students who use L1 to help one other to prepare what they have to give in English to fulfill the task. The following task will help you to consider these issues in more detail.

**Task 3**

- Read Eldridge, 1966; Hancock, 1997; Sert, 2005, all included in the core reading for this module, and make a note of the reasons identified for code-switching in each of them. Consider both teachers and learners.

- Check your notes and make a list combining your findings under one label, when appropriate. You may find different terms to describe the same phenomenon.

While the aim of Task 3 was to make you more familiar with the literature on this topic, Task 4 will be an opportunity for you to analyze your own data with reference to code-switching.

**Task 4**

At this stage, I’d like to go back to the recordings that you did for Unit 4.

Analyze one extract from the recordings in detail and identify:

- With reference to the teacher, which of the functions of language, mentioned in the last point of Task 2 (or any other were performed in English and which in L1.
- When and for which purposes the learners used English and when and for which purpose they used L1.

Take notes of the similarities and the differences that you found between your answers in Task 2 and what emerges from the analysis. Is there anything you can learn from what emerges from the data?

If there are examples of code-switching in your data

- were they at the level of single words or single utterances or of stretches of discourse?
• Could they be attributed to one of the reasons identified in the list you produced in Task 3?

Consider both teacher and learners.

Read Nikolov, 1999 and see if you find some similarities between the situation she describes and yours.

Working on one’s own data generally opens up new perspectives as we become aware of how we really are in the classroom and of how learners respond. You may have discovered that your use of English might be extended or that you might make a more extended use of facilitating strategies to enhance comprehension or that, in some cases, a quick translation might be a useful resource. Another insight might be that what some of the learners said in L1 might be reworded in English and this would become comprehensible and meaningful input beyond their present level of interlanguage.

To conclude this section, I would like to highlight that recently there has been a growing consideration of the support role that L1 can have in learning L2, both in ESOL and in EFL contexts. An all English practice is seen as “implausible” considering the limited exposure to the target language of most EFL young learners and L1 can be a bridge to L2 (Klevberg, 2000). Using anything but the target language is considered a cause of inefficient learning (Sharp 2001). The value of L1 is focussed by humanistic approaches (Murakami, 2001). Mattioli (2004) argues that “perhaps the teacher and students can exchange in the L1 without harming the communicative focus of second language (L2) lessons” and L1 can become a vital resource in many ways. Taylor (2006) reports on how the value of L1 was discovered by a group of teachers aiming at extending the use of English in their classes of learners of the 5 -17 age range. All this, however, does not mean that we shouldn’t try all means to extend both the receptive and the productive use of English in the classroom and motivate learners to be in contact with English also beyond class time. I would look at the following as rather common attitudes that, in my experience, do not seem to pay in the long run:

• Making it too easy for the children and consistently using L1 except when “practising” on the basis that otherwise they “won’t understand”
• Trying to use English but switching to L1 immediately at the first difficulty
• Overwhelming learners with input far beyond their language level
• Overwhelming learners with too much input without giving them opportunities to grasp and re-use it.

7.2.2 The ARC model

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As second point in this section I would like to present Scrivener’s (1996) ARC descriptive model for classroom work on language, although not designed specifically for lessons addressed to young learners, can anyway be highly useful to describe them too. In the ARC acronym, A stands for “Authentic” and “in authentic activities the learners can freely use all the language they have at their disposal”; R stands for “Restricted” and in restricted activities there is a deliberate limitation on the language that learners can use and the language they are expected to produce or to understand “is controlled or constructed by the teacher”; C stands for “Clarification and Focus” which occurs “when learners look closely at some specific pieces of language, with or without immediate teacher help, with a focus on form”. It is like carefully observing some specific pieces of language that may be new or part of previous learning. (ibid: 77).

The key features of this framework are that it

- can be used to analyse any lesson without any special organization
- aims at identifying what happens in a lesson where working with the language takes place
- is concerned with “the language available for the student to use, or to understand” (Scrivener, 1996: 82)
- is descriptive rather than evaluative as it does not indicate a preference for any specific choice of language use
- encourages reflection as it leads to the awareness of the peculiar features of various forms of classroom discourse.

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<tr>
<th>Task 5</th>
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<td>Here are three quotes from Scrivener (1996: 85)</td>
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- **Authentic** is for communication, fluency, real-life, pleasure. Transmission of meaning is more important than correctness of form

- With **Restricted** the emphasis will tend to be on form over meaning

- Whereas **Restricted** is concerned with learning about language by using it, **Clarification** concerns looking at language more analytically, from outside

Can you give examples of activities suitable for young learners that would fit in one or the other of the three above categories?

Compare your list with that in Appendix B but remember that Scrivener’s list wasn’t specifically for young learners. Even so, it can give you an idea of the features of the activities in each group.
It may be that just hearing such terms as “authentic” or “restricted” has aroused strong feelings of approval or disapproval of one or the other, depending on your views of what works and what doesn’t work. However Task 5 should have shown you how equally valid activities belong to one or the other group and the issue is to look at a variety of learning opportunities and see the process that takes place, the kind of discourse that they originate and the kind of competence they are more likely to foster. With reference to young learners we might also observe that while “authentic” is essential for all ages, “clarification” would work only with the older group and “restricted” might be useful to establish routines and patterns provided it is limited to short periods in every lesson.

7.2.3 Language in course books

Much of the language learners of all ages experience both as receivers and producers comes from the materials they use and especially from the course book if there is one.

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<th>Task 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take a course book for young learners and choose a chapter or unit and analyse the activities using the ARC framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Which type of activity is dominant? With a specific group of learners in mind, say if you think there is the appropriate balance between the three types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you adapt this material for that group to experience more of the type of language that you consider desirable for them?</td>
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If you look at young learners’ books, you will notice that, although their blurbs identify them with different labels (activity-based, communicative, content-based or other), there is a great similarity in the topics and in the language items they cover, and, if there are differences, they are in the order of appearance. Most books deal with colours, numbers, shapes, greetings, family, friends, birthday, festivities, daily routines, school, holidays, free time, games, sport, parts of the body, animals and pets, some kind of imaginary characters, feelings, likes and dislikes, food and drinks, one or two topics relating to the geography or culture of Great Britain and/or of other English speaking countries. As for functions, there are greetings, polite requests, invitations, how to ask questions and how to respond, how to describe people, animals and things. The notional content is relatively richer as there are various ways of expressing time and space, comparison, ability and possession. The structures included in all books are the present of to be, have got, can, simple present, present continuous, imperative, to be going to and their interrogative and negative forms; personal pronouns, possessive, time and place prepositions, wh- questions.
Few books are so adventurous to introduce some forms of the past and of the futures, I’d like and a good number of phrasal verbs, just to quote a few items that are essential tools of a speaker beyond the survival level. By contrast, most primary books include lots of exclamations such as wow and cool which generally are immediately picked up and used by the majority of young learners. Another common feature of many courses revealed only by very careful analysis is that the volume corresponding to the age 8 group is the one that introduces the richest structural content, which is then recycled with few new additions in the last two volumes, while there is generally a progressive exposure to a wider vocabulary throughout the whole course. Apart from activities of various types the most common type of text in young learners’ courses are dialogues, stories, comic strips, or dialogues disguised as comic strips, songs and rhymes.

Task 7

Consider the language and topic content just described or look at the table of contents of a course book for young learners and, with reference to a specific group of learners, answer the following:

- Is the language suitable for their age group and their present stage of cognitive and affective development?
- Is it likely to meet their needs for classroom communication? For any real life communication such as pen friends or email? Reading authentic children’s books in English? Watching authentic videos? Talking to foreigners visiting their school? Talking to young people from other countries they may meet in their hometown or on holiday? Any other probable opportunity of real life use?
- How is it likely to meet their future needs?

The limitation of books for learners of all ages is that they generally provide a neutral model of language, devoid of any strong idiomacity or any real consideration of register, illustrating the basic grammar and vocabulary patterns and, obviously, mainly in the written medium. The accompanying audio-aids are generally the recorded version of the texts in the book, and it does not happen that the book provides the script of real conversations. There are no or few features of natural oral language such as a high proportion of short chunks, sometimes without a verb, lexical phrases and so on.

Most course books devote some sections to grammar teaching but show a rather restricted picture of grammar and fail to focus on common lexical patterning and collocations. With reference to the grammar sections, there are those that argue that YL course books devote far too much attention to activities and not enough to grammar (Sharma 1994); on the other side, others feel that grammar had for too long been the dominant feature of YL syllabuses and this accounted for children being non-communicative and ‘turned off’ by foreign language learning. The latter group

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Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
sees the activity-based perspective in present course books to be more in accordance with what is known about how YLs learn. A thought-provoking recent phenomenon is that while there is an almost general agreement in the literature about children’s ability to work out the rules of English grammar for themselves, although without being expected to articulate them, the number of published grammar books for young learners is increasing rapidly. It is difficult to say if it is a new pedagogical trend with the pendulum swing going back to more grammar or if it is just another opportunity of expanding the market for young learners or a bit of both.

The above discussion and the reference to the “clarification” activities in the previous section bring us back to one of the issues considered in Unit 4 and precisely how young learners can better internalize grammar and whether explicit grammar teaching has a role in young learners’ courses.

### Task 8

Reflect on the following:

- What is your idea about children learning grammar? Make examples from your experience, if you are teaching young learners or, if you are not, ask a colleague who does.

- How would you respond to a colleague supporting one of the following views?

  *When learners make wrong grammar hypotheses as proved by such forms as “goed” or “childrens”, the teacher should remodel their utterances without any explicit correction*

  *The teaching of grammar should have no place in a young learners classroom as grammar is too difficult for them*

  *Grammar should be taught through the practice of language patterns, however without introducing any grammar labels*

  *Content-based ways of teaching ESOL and EFL produce advantages in fluency but without any noticing of forms, learners’ production will continue to be heavily affected by interference from L1*

  *Vocabulary and grammar should be taught (and ideally learnt) together*

  *Many adults “know” rules but then they cannot apply them in free contexts; there is no reason for suggesting that the knowledge of rules would help young learners better*
The teaching of grammar should have no place in a young learners’ classroom as grammar has no relevance for children’s learning.

Substituting vocabulary in known chunks is a way of developing the learners’ grammar skills.

Children are taught metalanguage in their L1, so why not use this tool to teach them some L2 rules?

Children become competent L1 speakers without any grammar lessons so why teach them L2 grammar explicitly?

Probably the above task has made you aware not just of your approach to teaching grammar but also of the variety and complexity of aspects to consider when dealing with this component of language learning and use. Has the task given you any new insights about grammar in the young learners’ classroom? For sure the more intense the exposure to L2 is, the easier it is for learners to internalise grammar unconsciously; the ability of positive exploitation of grammar knowledge depends on the learners’ level of cognitive development and on personal factors; some young ones can do it and like it, some cannot and consequently do not like it; young learners can be taught to refer to input to learn how to express their meanings.

As far as I could find, only Cameron (2001) and Pinter (2006) dedicate a whole chapter to the role of grammar in early FL learning. The former looks at the development of grammar as a long and complicated process. In her view “the teacher of young learners can probably best help to develop children’s grammar in the foreign language, not by teaching grammar directly, but by being sensitive to opportunities for grammar learning that arise in the classroom.” A grammar-sensitive teacher will see the language patterns that occur in oral and written texts and discourse types and “will have a range of techniques to bring these patterns to the children’s notice, and to organise meaningful practice.” (Ibid: 121 – 122). The latter (2006: 86) supports that “for younger children, vocabulary and grammar should be learnt in a holistic way and only when they grow older and begin to show interest in language analysis, can separation begin with the powerful tool of analysis while they continue to learn from rich input.” Cameron’s chapter is one of your readings for this unit, but, if you can get hold of Pinter too and read chapter 7 it might be interesting to compare them and find out their similarities and differences.

7.3 Child Language: but what model?

Written by Paula de Nagy
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
At this point of your reflection on how to foster young learners’ development of competence in English you may have noticed the recurrence of some key factors that could be summarized as follows:

- It is the teacher’s responsibility to motivate learners to engage with learning English by using materials and methods that are appropriate to their age group, state of development and interests. Our main task as teachers of YLs is to engage them so that the learning of English is perceived as interesting and exciting.

- The learning conditions affect the young learners commitment in working with the target language and a relaxed and accepting environment has a high potential in encouraging children to experiment with language.

- The more learners are in contact with English either as receivers and elaborators of input or as actors in production or interaction, the more they are likely to learn.

The last statement above introduces us to the issue focused in this section as we do not have to consider only the quantity of the contact with English, but the quality as well; however, while it is relatively easy to find ways of extending and intensifying the exposure to English, the choice of the quality of the language to be introduced with young learners is extremely complex and not sufficiently explored so far.

If we look at L1 language development, we observe that five year old children are fully competent in their native language but children of that age use language differently from teenagers and adults; our use of the native language, to a certain extent, seems to be shaped by age. Similarly we could pose the question whether young learners should be taught peer language or adult language considering that, in many contexts, the opportunities of face to face contact with speakers of English (both native and non native) are rare events for most of them as long as they are “young”; at that age, if there is a direct contact through English as the means of communication it is often in written forms although there may be a variety of media. So what kind of language? And how is that language selected? You may also remember that in 1.4 there was a discussion about the problems involved when trying to identify the aims and objectives for early foreign language learning.

It could be argued that language in books for YLs bears no resemblance to the language that their peers in English-speaking countries would actually use. This raises an interesting issue – when we teach YLs English, who are we preparing them to communicate with? If you agree with the argument put forward in Brewster et al. (1992) that teaching YLs is primarily the laying of foundations for secondary education, then perhaps the problem can be postponed somewhat. On the other hand,
if learners are going to communicate with each other in the classroom and with other children through email or pen pal schemes, they will need language. But what language should that be? Obviously it should be suited to their age group and areas of interest. We might want to teach them to communicate with their peers either in English-speaking countries or in non-English speaking countries where English is used as an international language. But how do we establish what language is then appropriate and how do we cater for the ever-changing nature of such language? Or are there more suitable criteria that should inform the selection of language? Here are some aspects to consider when trying to deal with the above questions:

- The idea of children’s minds as *tabula rasa* is no longer part of common pedagogy nowadays and most teachers would acknowledge that children come to the class with general communication skills from their L1 experience; what all L2 learners have in common is that they know another language and this gives them the skills to work with language in general (Hudelson 1989). Most children know some English words commonly used in their L1. Even so they are just at the starting point of their long journey to L2 competence. They often do not recognize the English words they know as such and if the teacher intends to capitalise on them, s/he has to make children aware of their origin. Whether learners have English lessons as part of their school curriculum or attend private language schools, we have to accept that English in the classroom has to be adapted to their level and, especially in the initial phases, cannot be as rich and varied as “authentic” English. (Don’t caretakers do the same with L1 with toddlers and very young children?). This, however, does not mean it should be asking silly questions or speaking about the same things in every lesson or other nonsense. Exposure to genuine English is desirable from the beginning provided it is combined with appropriate scaffolding.

- Seedhouse (1996) argues that the key issue when considering discourse in the language classroom is not whether communication is ‘genuine’ or ‘natural’ which he considers unlikely, if not impossible, in a classroom situation. Instead, he feels that we need to accept that the institutional context (the classroom) calls for “an institutional variety of discourse produced by a speech community or communities convened for the institutional purpose of learning English” (1996:23). He argues, in addition, that classroom discourse should not be seen as the ‘poor cousin’ of discourse but that it is of as much importance and relevance in its own right as any other type of discourse. If we accept this argument, then there is a need to devote more attention to identifying exactly what the desirable ‘institutional discourse’ for the YL classroom is. This will include the teacher’s language (initiating exchanges, responding, telling stories, etc.), the child’s language when communicating with the teacher and their peers - orally and in writing - and the language used for communicating with the outside world. In this perspective, classroom discourse can be genuine and natural in its own right.
• There is no corpus of children’s language but at least the reasons for them to
use language are easily arguable: they use language for social purposes, for
play and for learning; L2 learners should primarily be taught how to perform
these functions as they can lead to “authentic” language use in the classroom,
which may be the only situation where they all are in contact with English and
the one that can either support their initial motivation or quench it. The most
authentic and useful language available in the classroom is the language used
to live the here and now of the classroom life even if, in the context of
classroom discourse, the value of language learning activities should not be
underestimated. (If you are interested in collections of child language you
could visit CHILDES (Child Language Description Exchange) at
http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/).

• A detailed description of young children’s use of language in the classroom is
in Appendix C and if you have any direct experience of the 4/7 age group, you
might compare it with your observations. Remember, however, that Tough’s
list (1977) expresses the children’s needs and has to be understood as
objectives to be achieved and not as what children can already do in L2.
Similar research could be profitably carried out with older groups as their
communicative needs may already be moving towards those of teenagers and if
a content based approach is adopted, learners need to understand and express
more refined meanings.

• As the specific future needs of English of present young learners are
identifiable only in a very general way, it would be sensible to expose them to
the most frequent words in a reliable frequency list (such as the Bank of
English Cobuild Corpus) finding ways of including frequent vocabulary while
dealing with topics relevant for the ages considered. A balance is needed
between that everyday language and the unusual lexis present in some rhymes
or songs.(See Unit 5, task 11). This does not mean banning the language for
play and imagination “that is intrinsically motivating and facilitates L2
learning: It is affectively charged, and it therefore makes L2 discourse more
noticeable and thus memorable. It not only encourages students to expand their
vocabulary but it also provides authentic language use situations and can be
seen as linguistic preparation for conversation outside the classroom” (Cekaite
and Aronsson, 2005: 170)

• The Governments’ long-term reasons for teaching English to YLs also have an
impact on these matters. (See Unit 1). These might include cultural, cognitive,
psychological and social reasons. Pinter (2006) mentions the development of
basic communication skills in English, the promotion of learning about other
cultures, the development of cognitive skills, the development of
metalinguistic awareness and learning to learn as common aims of many TYL
programmes. Responding to each of the above aims may involve partially
different linguistic choices. If, for example, the introduction of early FL
languages is justified as a way of promoting international understanding
through an awareness of other people’s cultures, contact with other children in a range of other countries, possibly through email, would be important, and learners could be given experience of spontaneous unplanned informal writing. If the development of basic communication skills is at stake, then giving learners the tools to communicate in L2 in the classroom becomes a priority while metalinguistic awareness takes to an inevitable shift towards L1.

<table>
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<th>Task 9</th>
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<td>Do one of the following at your choice</td>
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**A.** Make a list of activities and text types that might be useful in pursuing one of the aims mentioned by Pinter or one of the aims of a YL course you are familiar with.

**B.** Find a story and an informative text usable with young learners and identify:
- the discourse features of the two texts
- the lexical areas covered
- the recurrent language patterns

How is the language content that you have identified different from that of a course book with which you are familiar?

What present and future language needs of learners can be met by each of the texts?

Would you envisage any problems in using them with one of your young learners’ classes?

It is vital that learners of English, like children learning a first language, gain experience of as wide a variety of language as possible; different genres offer different learning opportunities; story narrative (*The Three Bears*) is quite different from expository text from a child’s book on wild animals (*All about bears*) or a matching exercise in a course book where they match pictures of animals to habitats. Children need experience of both spontaneous and planned language, of spoken and written, of monologue and interaction, and this language needs to be suitable for their age group and cognitive level.

### 7.4 The teacher’s role in developing L2

I would not wonder if at this point your feeling is that this Unit has raised questions rather than trying to answer them and that teachers are confronted by seemingly contrasting challenges. In fact, in the previous Units you were constantly encouraged to trust the children’s potential for language learning and here you have found some
words of caution about a full immersion pedagogy; besides after reflecting on the limitations of the language model available in course-books, you have been reminded of the pedagogic value of classroom discourse; finally you have been confronted with a discussion on the suitable language content for young learners. Here the issue is on how the teacher can pursue an effective balance between language authenticity and language pedagogy.

In Units 2 and 3, you explored the issues of first and second language acquisition and briefly considered their implications for the classroom environment. Based on our understanding of SLA and our beliefs on teaching of YLs, it should be possible to argue that there are two givens in terms of the teacher’s use of language in the YL classroom which most practitioners support. Firstly, that the teacher’s use of English in the classroom serves a similar role to that of adult /carer speech - children need to be exposed to large quantities of speech, used naturally and in context, which familiarises them with both the sounds of the language and its components for expressing meaning. The second point is that children should be exposed to functional classroom language right from the start, e.g.: ‘Have you finished?’, ‘I don’t understand’ and encouraged (not forced!) to use this language to communicate with each other and the teacher. This will probably be assimilated as chunks of language with no attention whatsoever being drawn to how the speech act is formed (e.g. Present Perfect, Present Simple). The context makes it clear. In this way, children learn to manipulate and use English for real communication and it lays the foundation for later analysis when children’s cognitive abilities are stronger.

In the initial stages of learning, some children, even after a year-long course, may still only be able to repeat isolated words when prompted by a familiar context, sing songs or recite rhymes in chorus with someone else. However, this does not mean that no learning has taken place or that the course has been a waste of time. You saw in Unit 2, that there are certain stages in the acquisition of L1. Young children acquiring their first language hear an awful lot of language before they start to make themselves understood. The ‘silent period’ of L2 learning may be an echo of some of these characteristics of L1 acquisition. If children are understanding and feel comfortable communicating with the English-speaking adult (even if they choose to do so in their own language), there has already been progress. The frequent and meaningful exposure to lots of English will help them to develop a familiarity with the language, acquire good pronunciation (which is still the only proven advantage of starting to learn a foreign language at a very early age) and hopefully, encourage them to start using some language. This might be the ability to use relevant classroom phrases – ‘Can you lend me a pencil?’ or simply ‘No pencil’, ‘I forgot to do my homework.’ ‘My turn’ or to take part in a brainstorm of words about a topic, or even to recite chunks of a story. Seager (1998:17) observed that very young children (3-6 year-olds), when dealing with a new language in the classroom “have a capacity for spontaneously understanding and reacting without feeling the need to analyse or fully
understand what is being said.” Teachers can use this to their advantage by encouraging children to concentrate on saying what they want to say and reformulating it correctly, very much in the same way that caretaker speech works (see Lightbown and Spada, 1993). An extremely valid source of ways to use English to communicate with young learners in the ordinary classroom situations is found in Slattery & Willis 2001.

The above comments are, to a great extent, true for all ages. However, in some contexts, teachers working at primary level are discouraged from using the target language with students, being told rather to use the child’s native language until ‘they know some English’. This seems a round-about way of approaching language learning, where language is talked about, rather than accepting that when we teach a foreign language it is both the subject and the means of learning that subject (Curtain & Pesola 1994) and languages are learnt through use and not to be used only when “learnt”.

To go back to the issue of teacher-talking-time, I feel, that with YLs we need to accept that teachers will be doing a lot of the speaking until the children are able and willing to experiment with using the language themselves. It is unlikely that children will be able to use much of the language that they hear from the teacher or from other sources for a long while. As with their first language, they will begin at word/chunk level and gradually begin to use longer phrases, and string them together. As in first language learning, a child’s language initially may be incorrect in form; children prefer to concentrate on expressing meaning in any way they can. This is a perfectly natural and healthy approach to language learning in the YL classroom and it is to be encouraged.

Task 10

Here are two different classroom situations that need to be tackled appropriately. What would you suggest?

- Think of ways to foster the children’s active role in the English lesson at the beginning of a course when the teacher has to do most of the talking and there is a need to respect the children’s silent phase.

- When young learners “can speak” some teachers tend to devote most of the time to productive activities and may tend to neglect listening and exposure to input. Think of ways to find a balance between input and output.

Here is another task to reflect on the options available in the language classroom.
### Task 11

Read the list below with suggestions for developing the use of English in the classroom. Have you ever experimented any of them? If you have, has it produced the expected results? Give examples. Which are more suitable to your context? Give reasons.

- “Concentrating at first on a small range of phrases of general use and being consistent in their use; extending this small range of phrases by replacing the elements; extending this small range of phrases by elaboration of the elements; extending this small range of phrases by the use of alternative phrases for established ones.” (Tough, 1985). Repeating the process with more advanced input
- Acknowledging the learners’ trials to express themselves in English with genuine interest in what they say, regardless of how they say it; responding to content
- Giving them indirect feedback, rewording their content in a more appropriate way
- Encouraging them to use their even limited L2 resources to convey their meanings without looking for a word to word equivalent of the L1 expressions.
- Giving them the English equivalent of items they ask for when it is important for them or it is the only way for them to try to say in English what they want to communicate
- Responding to content and not just to form

In our search for ways to improve our approach to language use in the classroom, we can also be helped by research conducted by others that may provide insights relevant to our situation or may suggest areas for further exploration. Here are some studies that report a variety of experiences whose common aim was the development of young learners’ communicative skills in English as second or foreign language. Dufficy (2004) deals with an investigation of the relationship between tasks and use of particular patterns in a multilingual primary classroom in Australia; Pinter (1999) explores the relationship between type of task and strategies employed by children; Nesi (1999) is concerned with how children exploit the grammatical information included in a monolingual dictionary; Mackey and Silver (2005) is a study on the relationship between feedback and the improvement of question formation in a multilingual group in Singapore; Carless (2006) describes a project introducing the collaboration of native and non native teachers in Hong Kong; Aline and Hosoda (2006) deal with a similar experience in Japan; Schwarzer and Luke (undated) show how inquiry cycles can be applied in beginning-level foreign language classes and provide ideas for implementation and adaptation. Williams M. (2001) focuses on various ways to implement mediation and help learners to learn and Coyle and Vrdú (2000) analyse the relationship between children’s learning and specific teacher
behaviours inspired by SLA principles. Williams L. J. (2000) investigates the forms and functions of repetition and provides also a brief reference to the ways repetition occurs in contexts different from the classroom.

**Task 12**

Read one of the articles mentioned above or any other dealing with similar topics and find out

- how the teacher’s strategies have shaped learning
- an activity or a strategy that you think might be used in or adapted to your TYL context
- unsuccessful strategies if any

**7.5 Looking ahead**

This Unit has led you to reflect on the multiplicity of the factors underlying language choices in TYL and hopefully has encouraged you to try new ways to reconcile the two opposite needs emerging from this discussion; they are the acceptance and respect of learners’ development rate in the affective, cognitive and linguistic dimensions and the need to produce a substantial progress in their L2 competence.

As conclusion I would like to refer to an article by Prodromou (undated) that highlights how “teachers need to grow and continue to see their job with fresh eyes, if they are to continue to bring about change in their learners’ language ability”. According to his perspective, sculpture, painting, poetry and music “provide a different point of view of the teaching process which may help the teacher see her job in ways previously unimagined.” On the classroom level, the metaphors he draws on suggest classroom techniques to transform learners into more successful participants in the process of acquiring language. He exploits the idea that the teaching of English as a foreign language is parallel to art in as much as it has a transformative power of raw material, in our case textbook language or learner language. How do you think this might happen? Compare your ideas with the text in Appendix D.

There are many ways in which you could follow up what we have covered in this unit as we have revisited many of the topics covered in previous units in a holistic perspective and explored the core issue of language learning which is the relationship between authentic and pedagogic uses of the target language. You might like to:

- record a series of lessons and analyse code-switching, or teacher’s strategies or learners’ strategies;
• try innovative ways of developing specific aspects of language competence and see their short term and long term effects;
• replicate a study you have read about that is relevant to your context;
• make a frequency list of the language items found in a course book or other material for children and compare it with a reliable general frequency list
• Any other ideas?

Any of these could be developed into a focus for your assignment or even your dissertation.

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Teaching Young Learners Unit 7

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**Appendix A** *(From Aston University MSc TESOL/TESP, Module Teaching Young Learners, Unit 6, pages 5 – 7, 2003)*

Teresa was 7 years old when her parents decided to enrol her in a language institute to learn English. Her mother had been working at the same institute for a number of
years and spoke fluent English so Teresa had heard English throughout her life. She lived in a country where television was not dubbed and so there had been further exposure to English. Her brother had begun English classes a couple of years previously and she appeared to be enthusiastic and excited about starting classes. But within a couple of weeks, it had become clear that she was not happy. She tended to be reluctant to participate in class, complained to her parents that she ‘didn’t like English’ and tried on a regular basis to avoid attending classes. Her obvious unhappiness was extremely troubling for all concerned as she was normally an extremely confident, friendly and enthusiastic child with a keen intellect. Neither parents nor her teacher could offer any reason why she seemed to have this aversion to English until she finally revealed why she was so unhappy. The fairly inexperienced teacher had insisted that the children spoke only English during the lesson. As they were just starting out, they could say nothing other than the language the teacher had introduced. For Teresa, not being able to express herself in her own language meant that this eloquent, funny and articulate child had had her best means of interpreting and experiencing the world removed from her. Either she continued to speak her own language where she could be witty and in control but would get into trouble with the teacher or she ‘behaved’ and spoke only English thus feeling that her own sense of self was threatened.

The solution, in Teresa’s case, was relatively easy to arrive at. The teacher was consulted and she agreed to ensure that the children were given more opportunities to speak L1 and the freedom to express themselves in L1 if they felt the need to do so. Gradually, Teresa was won over and eventually performed as competently as her peers. She has, however, never quite lost her reluctance to use foreign languages, perhaps due to that initial shock of having her power of speech removed from her.

Appendix B

Scrivener, 1996: 84

See your module blackboard

Appendix C

(From Tough, 1977: 90)

Purposes for using language in the classroom

Our knowledge of young children’s priorities for using language in the classroom, gained from appraisals, indicates that all children use language most frequently for the following purposes;

1. for gaining attention and approval
2. for identifying objects and actions
3. for stating what they have or what they want to have
4. for telling other people what they want them to do
5. for asking for permission to do or take things
6. for claiming their possessions
7. for defending themselves
8. for asking where things are and following directions to find them
9. for making a running commentary on their activities
10. for anticipating a way of working
11. for directing others and following the directions of others
12. for exploring new situations, for finding out about people, things and events
13. for imagining in play.

Appendix D

Prodromou, ELT Concerto: Transforming Teachers

See your Module Blackboard
TYL Unit 8

Interaction in the YL classroom

Content

Goals
Reading

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Second Language Acquisition and interaction

8.3 Some characteristics of classroom interaction

8.4 The IRF model of classroom interaction

8.5 Classroom interaction and questions

8.6 Teacher follow-up as a source of input and learning

8.7 Learner roles in interaction

8.8 Alternative interaction patterns

8.9 Group work

8.10 Written interaction

8.11 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
**Goals**

This unit examines interaction in the YL classroom and looks at some of the ways in which both teacher and learner talk is organised.

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Critically evaluate one model of classroom interaction, the IRF model
- Discuss the roles of teachers and learners in the YL classroom
- Identify some patterns of interaction in L2 classrooms and how they might contribute to L2 learning
- Identify interaction patterns in classrooms in your own context in terms of the opportunities for language input and output
- Compare spoken and written classroom interaction and the opportunities they present for language learning.

**Note:** All the interaction samples in this unit, unless otherwise stated, are taken from recordings made for the book ‘English for Primary Teachers’ by Mary Slattery and Jane Willis (O.U.P.). The transcription conventions are the same as those in Unit 2. We would like to thank all those teachers who sent in lesson recordings to help us gather data.

**Reading**

**Core reading**

- **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P. Chapter 3
- **Cullen, R.** 2002. “Supportive teacher talk: the importance of the F-move”. In *ELT Journal* Vol. 56/2. O.U.P.
8.1 Introduction

In the previous unit you looked at some aspects of language use in the YL classroom, including the role of code-switching among learners and the role of teacher talk. In this unit we will look at how interaction develops in the social context of the classroom. We will start by looking at some of the research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and how this might be relevant to classroom interaction. We will then go on to investigate one particular model of classroom discourse, the IRF model, in some detail. This model attempts to describe teacher-led interaction and we will examine how this may or may not fulfil certain conditions which, in the light of recent research, would seem to be conducive to SLA. We will then go on to consider some alternative forms of interaction and see if it is possible to organise classroom interaction in order to promote what have been described as “optimal conditions for students’ use of language for classroom learning”. Finally, we will briefly look at written discourse as a form of classroom interaction. Note that for the purposes of this unit we will be using the terms ‘interaction’ and ‘discourse’ more or less synonymously.
Classroom interaction is a vast topic and we cannot hope to cover everything in one unit. This unit presents some of the basic issues which we hope will encourage you to find your own areas to explore. It is complementary to the previous unit and also to the unit on classroom interaction in the Analysis of Spoken Interaction Module (ASI).

Many of the tasks in this unit are based on your own data, so in order to get the most out of it, you need to have recordings handy of both teacher-fronted and group/pair interaction in your local YL context, either from your own classroom or from a colleague’s. The data you collected for your FND task and/or the data you collected for Unit 4 of this module may well be suitable. If you wish to record a colleague’s lesson and you haven’t yet done the ASI module, you might like to start the unit by looking at Appendix D where you will find some suggestions on practical issues.

### 8.2 Second Language Acquisition and interaction

In Units 2 and 3 you looked at differences in how children learn their first language and how they learn a second language. Of course, there are also fundamental differences between learning a second language in a natural setting (through social interaction or in an educational setting where most of the children are native speakers, for example) and in a formal classroom setting where the language being learnt is a second language for all learners. Most people agree that second language learners, be they adults or children, are more successful when they have regular exposure to the language outside the L2 classroom.

#### TASK 1

Think back to the points made in Unit 3 and quickly list the ways in which L2 learning in natural settings differs from L2 learning in the classroom. You should consider such things as error correction, type and amount of exposure to L2, order of exposure, time etc.

When you've done this, you could compare your ideas with those of Lightbown and Spada (2006: 109 -114) (see Appendix A), who also consider the differences between natural and instructional settings and, within the latter, between those that are “structure based” and those that are “communicative”.

How do you think the instructional settings described by Lightbown and Spada reflect the context of young learners classrooms?
There are many examples of research into Second Language Acquisition which indicate the importance of interaction in L2 learning and, if you are interested in following this up, there is a useful and detailed summary of the findings in Pica (1994: 497-517). Unfortunately, most of these SLA studies have been based on experimental data obtained outside the classroom and it is legitimate to question how relevant these findings may be to the classroom, given that the classroom constitutes a particular context with its own rules and norms of behaviour (both verbal and non-verbal). However, it would seem that, very generally, we can deduce from this research that, although there is no definite agreement as to how interaction may contribute to second language acquisition, both reception-based and production-based factors are important.

Ellis (1997) argues that there is still only limited empirical evidence on the effect of input and interaction in shaping the process of language learning but he does discuss the arguments supporting this view. He starts with Krashen’s input hypothesis advocating that L2 acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to input a little more advanced than their current level; he then considers Long’s interaction hypothesis which maintains that input is effective “when it is modified through the negotiation of meaning” (ibid: 47). The other two perspectives that he presents are based on the contribution of scaffolding in helping learners to develop their L2 expression through interaction with more competent others.

Access to samples of spoken and written language and opportunities to practise the target language are essential conditions in the process of language learning according to Nunan (2004), while the function of output in the development of fluency and as a way for learners to test their hypotheses is highlighted by Swain (1995).

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**Task 2**

- List three or four sources of comprehensible input and opportunities for meaningful output that may be found in the YL language classroom.

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There have been many studies of the role that comprehensible input and comprehensible output may play in classroom language learning. For example, research by Wong-Fillmore (1985) concerning children in American kindergartens and elementary schools who are ‘limited in English proficiency’ (LEP), has shown that simple exposure to the second language is not sufficient to ensure intake. Wong-Fillmore sought to discover why children in certain
classes, who entered school with no English, had all learned some English by the end of their first year, while children in other classes had not. Although great care must be taken in applying research findings from one context to another, completely different context, some of her conclusions are interesting. Having excluded possible variables such as the proportion of English-speaking children in the class, the innate ability of the LEP children and their exposure to English outside the classroom, Wong-Fillmore found that the differences between classes lay in the way in which teachers gave the learners opportunities to practise the second language and the way in which they used the language themselves. The classes in which the learners made most progress in English were those which made the greatest use of teacher-fronted activities and in which the teacher involved all learners in answering questions, tailoring the question to the level of the learner, so that even the lowest proficiency learners could participate in the form of simple, one word answers. Teacher talk in these classes was characterised, for example, by avoidance of the L1, high use of repetition and language routines. (There is a summary of Wong-Fillmore’s findings in Appendix B). Wong-Fillmore notes that the teacher may be the only really competent English speaker available to provide comprehensible input, but this input, in order to be effective must also be modified in order to be comprehensible.

Pica et al. (1987), based on findings from their experiments using native speaker/non-native speaker adult dyads, report that the most effective modifications are those made when learners explicitly indicate that adjustments are necessary to aid their understanding. They conclude:

*Perhaps the most significant pedagogical implication to be drawn is that any teacher or method that facilitates a realignment of the traditional roles of teacher and student, so that students can take greater initiative or assume more responsibility for their own learning, is likely to encourage in-class oral interaction, which in turn can increase comprehension of input.* (ibid: 755)

We will be looking at how learners can take greater initiative below.

In terms of output, Musumeci (1996) found that the teachers in her study of content-based Italian lessons never admitted to learners that their (the learners’) messages had not been understood. They either did their best to understand or abandoned the interaction. While this may be an attempt to save a learner (or possibly the teacher) from the risk of embarrassment,

*It reduced the student’s role to one of supplying linguistic ‘hints’ to the teacher, rather than functioning as full partners in the exchange. By not
asking students to reformulate their messages, the kind of negotiation which might push the learners’ L2 grammars - according to Swain - did not occur. (ibid: 315)

This discussion of the negotiation of comprehensible input and output is closely tied to theories of learning through social interaction and the work of L.S. Vygotsky in the field of cognitive psychology that you looked at in Units 2 and 3. Researchers working in the field of language acquisition have made use of Vygotsky’s idea of ‘verbal scaffolds’, whereby teachers build ‘scaffolds’ to support learners’ language development and then gradually remove them so that the learners become independent. We will be going into this in more detail later too, so you may like to remind yourself of Vygotsky’s theories before you go any further.

If we accept that both reception and production-based factors are important in second language acquisition, even though it is not yet clear how the dynamics actually work, then it will be useful to examine actual examples of classroom interaction in primary classrooms to see what opportunities there are for learners to be exposed to language for input and the opportunities they are given to be able to use the language in meaningful communication. As conclusion to this section do Task 3 that will help you to reflect on the issue of interaction with special reference to young learners.

Task 3

Read the extract below from Pinter (2006: 55 – 56) and note:

- what she says about children’s ability to communicate
- the suggested procedures to develop their speaking skills

Do you agree with her statements?

“To be able to speak fluently in a foreign language requires a lot of practice. Speaking practice starts with practising and drilling set phrases and repeating models. A great deal of time in language classroom is often spent on theses repetitive exercises. Speaking practice, however, can also mean communicating with others in situations where spontaneous contributions are required. Fluent speakers will also have to learn a range of other things such as what is appropriate to say in certain situations, how to manage conversations, and how to interrupt and offer their own contributions. It is a difficult and lengthy process to master all these subskills.

Children are not necessarily competent communicators even in their mother tongue with regard to some of the above sub-skills. For example, they may be unable to
appreciate what other speakers already know or may not know the rules of what is appropriate in which situation or how to be polite when interrupting. It is important for teachers to familiarize themselves with what their children can do in their first language. At the beginning stages with children it is a good idea to focus on simple but purposeful and meaningful pattern drilling and personalized dialogue building in order to prepare them to be able to talk about themselves and their world and to begin to interact with their friends in class and other speakers of the language.”

I (Rita) do not know how you reacted to the above task. I see a relationship between what Pinter observes about children and perspectives on L1 outlined in the previous Unit (See 7.4). As for the suggestions about how to develop speaking skills, I think that pattern drilling, although “purposeful and meaningful” should be no longer than few minutes in every lesson. What I appreciate in Pinter is that she acknowledges that fluency is a goal that needs time and varied practice to be achieved and that she makes a distinction between teaching interaction to children and older learners.

8.3 Some characteristics of classroom interaction

This section starts with a task that is an extension of your reflection on the differences between learning in a natural setting and learning in the classroom that is one of the key topics of this module and was also the objective of task 1 in this unit.

Task 4

• Try to make a list of what you consider to be at least four typical features of classroom interaction. Think about who speaks to who, when, why and what about.

The basic characteristics of classroom interaction can be described, perhaps rather simplistically as follows: firstly, it is oriented to pedagogical goals; the participants in classroom discourse are interacting primarily for the specific purpose of learning. Secondly, the participants have the roles of ‘instructor’ and ‘instructed’ and therefore have unequal rights of participation. Finally, there is a certain amount of centrally-focused attention with basic rules of participation: either one person speaks at a time or multiple speakers say more or less the same thing (van Lier, 1988:139).

These characteristics mean that, generally speaking, it is the teacher who controls the interaction. In most classrooms, the teacher decides who can talk.
at any given point and what the relevant topic is. Discourse is often shaped according to a fixed triad pattern as you will see in the following section.

### 8.4 The IRF model of classroom interaction


Sinclair and Coulthard's study was based on the analysis of data from British Primary schools and, on the basis of the data obtained, a model of the basic structure of classroom discourse was developed in terms of a system of hierarchically organised ‘ranks’, a term you may be familiar with from Halliday’s systemic functional grammar. This means that any unit at a given rank is made up of units from the rank below. The ranks identified by Sinclair and Coulthard, starting with the highest level, are: Lesson, Transaction, Exchange, Move and Act. So a Lesson consists of a series of Transactions and the transition from one Transaction to another is indicated by a Boundary Exchange, for example:

**Example 1a**

001 Teacher now put everything away – we’re going to do
002 something else --- we’re going to do something else ---
003 okay sh sh - now what do you think this is ?

Boundary Exchanges consist of **framing** moves and **focusing** moves. Words such as ‘right’, ‘now’ ‘okay’ constitute framing moves, which show where one stage of the lesson ends and a new stage begins. Sinclair and Coulthard note that framing moves are often followed by statements which tell the class what is going to happen or what is happening and they call these focusing moves. The teacher’s ‘we’re going to do something else’ can be classified as a focusing move.

After a Boundary Exchange, teachers often check their learners’ understanding (hence the teacher’s ‘okay’ in line 003 of Example 1a), before going on to what Sinclair and Coulthard (ibid.) call a Teaching Exchange. The most typical type of Teaching Exchange is the three part Eliciting Exchange consisting of teacher

**Initiation**, learner **Response** and teacher **Follow-up** (IRF). In fact, Example 1 continues:
Example 1b

001 Teacher now put everything away –we’re going to do
002 something else ---we’re going to do something else ---
003 okay sh sh ----- now (I) what do you think this is ?
004 Child (R) planet...planet
005 Teacher (F) okay

Here, the teacher’s initiation is in the form of an elicitation, typically realised by a question, which requires a verbal response or a ‘non-verbal’ surrogate such as a raised hand. Other typical exchanges are Teacher Direct and Teacher Inform. In a Teacher Direct exchange, the Initiation is often a command and a non-linguistic Response, such as sitting down or opening books, is predicted. The teacher’s ‘put everything away’ and ‘sh sh’ in Example 1 would be examples of Teacher Directs. A Teacher Inform has the function of passing on information, facts and opinions and often consists of only one move, although there may be an acknowledgment that the hearer is listening. An example would be the following:

Example 2 (Wong-Fillmore, 1985:44)

001 Teacher It’s really easy because you’re top number is one. So
002 all you have to do is go ahead and divide your second
003 number, the one they want to know the fractional part
004 of, by the denominator of your fraction.

Appendix C gives some more examples of Exchange sequences which you might like to consider before going further, especially if you have not taken the ASI module.

Task 5

If you have access to them, before you do this task you could read one of the following:

- Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, chapter 1)
- Sinclair and Coulthard (1992: 1 - 34)
- Mehan (1985)

They will help you to delve further into the topics covered in this section.

At this point.
• Listen to the recordings you have collected and find a teacher-fronted activity.
• Identify, roughly transcribe and label some instances of what you consider to be IRF sequences.
• Try to identify at least one example of a Boundary Exchange with Frame and Focus moves.
• What difficulties, if any, did you find in labelling sequences in this way? How frequent is the IRF Exchange in your data? (The majority of the lesson/a lot of the lesson/only used occasionally etc.)
• Can you identify any sequences in your data that don’t appear to fit these labels?

NB You are not expected to make very detailed transcripts or analyses - rough ones will do.

Sinclair and Coulthard’s analysis has been criticised for its theoretical approach, although this may be more as a result of expecting the model to do more than it was ever intended to. In fact, Sinclair and Coulthard only intended to describe the general structure of what goes on in the classroom. A general weakness in discourse analysis as a whole is the attempt to fit interaction into categories that have been defined *a priori*. This means that the categories are static and cannot capture the variety and complexity of language used in the classroom.

The second criticism is that the IRF pattern of discourse may just not be an accurate reflection of what goes on in the majority of classrooms, especially second language classrooms. Van Lier rejects any ‘rigid specification of rules’ and states:

> *It may well be that they characterize a specific type of L1 secondary class, or a specific activity type in classrooms in general, but it cannot be assumed that they constitute the ‘normal’ state of affairs in L2 classrooms, and that more conversational ways of speaking are departures from it.* (van Lier 1988:138-139)

It must be added, however, that most of the critics tend to refer to adult classrooms and researching its frequency in YL classrooms might be an area worthy of exploration. However, the IRF pattern undoubtedly does occur in classrooms and you probably had little trouble in finding examples in your data. As a pattern of interaction, it also has its advantages, as Johnson (1995:9-10) and van Lier (1996:149-150) both point out when they indicate that the IRF sequence is designed to facilitate the primary purpose of classroom interaction, which is that of learning. However, it is important to remember that:
The IRF is not an invariant, monolithic questioning procedure that has only one form and one function. Rather, it can vary along several dimensions, and in order to judge its place in education it is important to elaborate on the potential diversity within IRF. (van Lier, 1996:152).

With this in mind, we will use the IRF pattern as a basic reference point for what follows as we look at the possibilities and limitations of classroom interaction and the opportunities it gives for input and output, but we will make no attempt to make the discussion fit the model.

8.5 Classroom interaction and questions

One of the main things that teachers do in the classroom is asking questions. Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why you ask learners questions? Task 6 asks you to focus on this central aspect of your practice.

| Task 6 |
| Look at your data and pick out some questions you asked. |
| • Can you say why you asked those questions? |
| • What were your expectations with regard to the answers? |

Later in this section you will be asked to go back to what you have found out here.

In the context of the IRF sequence, the I slot will very often consist of an elicitation from the teacher in the form of a question, although this is by no means the only use of questions in the classroom (nor the only form of elicitations). One way that TESOL researchers have divided questions is into display questions and referential questions. Put very simply, display questions are those to which the teacher already knows the answer while referential questions are those to which he or she doesn’t know the answer and which are therefore considered more ‘genuine’. With reference to the latter observation, it is worth mentioning that “genuine” is the term used by Lightbown and Spada (2006: 114–129) for referential questions. Typically, display questions are used to enable learners to ‘display’ their knowledge of the language. For example:

Example 3

| 001 | Teacher | Good morning ----- is today Monday? |
| 002 | Children | No |
| 003 | Teacher | or maybe Tuesday? - or Sunday? |
An example of a referential question (even though the answer is fairly predictable!), on the other hand, would be the following:

Example 4

|   | Teacher | do you like chocolate eggs? - do you like chocolate 
|---|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------
|   | 001     | eggs? I love chocolate eggs                                   
|   | 002     | I like chocolate eggs /I love chocolate eggs                 
|   | 003     | I adore chocolate eggs                                        
|   | 004     | oh and you adore chocolate eggs ! okay that's great          

Task 7

Choose an extract of about 2 minutes from your data

- Identify all the questions you can.
- Classify them as display or referential questions.

Did you have any problems in doing this? Do you notice any differences in the children’s answers to display or to referential questions in terms of length of turn or complexity of the language used?

The distinction between display and referential questions in practice proves to be too simplistic. Banbrook and Skehan (1990) outline some of the problems with this distinction, which you may have found yourself when you tried to do the previous Task.

One criticism is similar to that of the IRF model that we discussed above – the simple distinction into display and referential questions doesn’t capture the different functions that questions might have. Display questions may be used for things other than simply displaying knowledge of the language. For example, they may have the function of involving children in the on-going interaction such as cooperative story-telling as the following example shows:

Example 5 - The class is preparing to write about a well known story:
Teacher and now are they happy?-  
Children they're happy  
Teacher and they sit at the table and eat - what?  
Children jam and cakes  
Teacher very good - jam and cakes - very good - okay  
now we're going to write the story and to draw it --  
okay -- now how does the story begin -- can you  
remember the first part of the story --- can you start?  
who can start?--- who wants to start ? ---- okay  
Patricia  
this is the story of Little Red Riding Hood  
Teacher good very good - and what happens to her ?  
Children all talking together  
Teacher just one person-- now what is next --- what comes  
next - Giada  
Giada go to Granny's - Mammy says ---  
Teacher good ---Mammy says - go to granny's --- now let's write that much  

Another, related issue that Banbrook and Skehan (ibid.) identify concerns the fact that it isn’t always possible to decide if a question is a display or a referential question. Take the following example:

Example 6

Teacher now everyone listen to my question - Giada - have  
Giada you got any brothers or sisters ---  
Teacher how many sisters have you got?  
Giada one  
Teacher one -- very good so you've got one sister --- okay  
Federica have you got any brothers or sisters?  
Federica brother - one  
Teacher one brother - good -- and Francesca --- have you got  
Francesca 3 brothers  
Teacher you've got 3 brothers! very good
Although the teacher’s questions here would seem to be referential, she nevertheless reacts to the children’s answers as if they were display questions, giving feedback on the form of their replies rather than the content - ‘good’ is not normally what you would reply when being told someone has a brother!

Of course, it could well be that these are display questions, if the teacher knows the details of all her pupils’ families. This brings up another point - does it therefore really matter if a question is a display or referential one? In the example above, we don’t know if the teacher knows the answers or not, but as van Lier (1988: 223) points out, the difference between display questions and referential questions may not make much difference in terms of the actual language used. If you look back at example 1, you will see that again we’re not actually aware if the teacher already knows the answers to the questions she is asking or not, but in terms of the language the child produces, this makes absolutely no difference (although we might like to argue that the psychological position of the child is different if he/she is the ‘knower’, which means that he/she is in a position of 'power', having information that the teacher needs and doesn’t have). Moreover, the use of display questions is characteristic of adult-child talk outside the classroom too.

Van Lier (ibid) maintains that the reason why teachers use questions to elicit certain contributions from learners is concerned with control - questions are a way of controlling what language the learner can use, of controlling what constitutes an appropriate contribution to the interaction. Examples of this are the question “when is your birthday?” used as an excuse to get learners to produce a date in the response.

Questions can also work as “ice-breakers” to introduce a topic or excite learners about what they are going to learn and can also be an expression of genuine interest in the learners! How do the previously listed functions match with your answers in Task 6?

We would tend to consider display questions as a natural way of interacting especially with the 4/6 age group as this is part of the ordinary way adults deal with children especially of that age. I would be more careful with older learners who will probably get bored by too many display questions. A nine-year-old child said to me (Rita) (in his L1): “The English teacher asks silly questions, for example: what colour is your hair and what colour are your eyes. These are things you can see!” The issue, however, is not whether a particular form of interaction is unnatural or inauthentic, but rather how it contributes to the pedagogic purpose of learning a language. What makes a question “authentic”, or at least meaningful and therefore interesting, is not so much the question itself but the way we deal with the answer. Mehan
(1985:126-127) highlights how “the two-part sequence (adjacency pair) is one of the basic building blocks of everyday discourse” but, at the same time, he shows how it is the third slot that makes the difference. See example 7.

Example 7

Example 7.1

Speaker A: What time is it, Denise?
Speaker B: Two-thirty
Speaker A: Very good, Denise!

Example 7.2

Speaker A: What time is it, Denise?
Speaker B: Two-thirty
Speaker A: Thank you, Denise

His comment is that “although both examples have a three-part sequential structure, the third component does not seem to serve the same function in both examples. While Very good, Denise! clearly evaluates the correctness of the previous reply, Thank you, Denise is more an acknowledgement of the previous reply.” His conclusion is that

The ubiquity of known-information questions in educational discourse is a function of the social distribution of knowledge among teachers and students; teachers know things that students do not know. It is also a function of the teacher’s role that includes also the responsibility of judging the quality of students’ performance (ibid.).

Both van Lier and Mehan deal with classrooms in general and not with young learners in particular. However, their observations provide useful insights for understanding YL classrooms too and their observations lead us naturally into the next section that deals with the teacher’s follow-up.

8.6 Teacher follow-up as a source of input and learning

In the previous unit you looked at how teacher talk can be an important source of exposure to the L2 for young learners. In this section we will look in more detail at the role of teacher follow-up moves, the F move of the IRF exchange we saw in 8.3. It would be extremely reductive to see teachers’ reactions to learners’ contributions as mere evaluations of utterances. In fact, there is a
whole range of things that teachers can do when they follow up learners’ utterances. Jarvis and Robinson (1997), for example, use Vygotsky’s (1978) ideas to look at how teacher follow-up moves can offer support to children’s language learning in a macro sequence of Focus-Build-Summarise, consisting of multiple IRF exchanges.

Task 8

Read Jarvis and Robinson (1997). Roughly transcribe a Transaction from your data, starting with a Boundary Exchange, in which the teacher is interacting with the class on a particular topic.

- Can you identify an instance of where the teacher achieves alignment through appropriation and formulation?
- Can you find an example of the creation of lexical networks and the contextualisation of lexical items in teacher responses?
- How useful do you find the macro sequence of Focus-Build-Summarise in analysing your data?
- If you find the Jarvis and Robinson model difficult to apply to your data, or simply too rigid, can you find any evidence in your extract as to how teachers may be supporting learners’ ZPDs?

The proliferation of labels is probably not particularly helpful to what we are trying to do here for the reasons that we have already discussed above. However, Jarvis and Robinson (ibid.) do show how potentially useful teacher follow-ups can be and how important it is for teachers to work with learners in constructing interaction. In their first example, the teacher kept control of the interaction, made sure it went in the direction she wanted it to go, but she did so by taking up the ideas and sub-topics introduced by the learners themselves, thus giving them at least a limited form of ownership over the discourse.

Another thing that is noticeable about the first example in Jarvis and Robinson, which they don’t discuss explicitly, is that the teacher avoids evaluating learners’ responses almost entirely. She either uses her follow-up slot to reformulate a learner’s utterance (in line 188, for example) or to proffer another elicitation (often including reformulation, as in line 180).

Nassaji and Wells (2000) investigate the form and function of what they called the ‘triadic dialogue’ (IRF) in L1 lessons at primary, middle school and university levels. Their paper is long and extremely detailed but their conclusions tie in with what we just noted above. They found that, while the initiation move was important in determining how a sequence developed, the follow-up move was even more important. The frequent use of evaluation in follow-up moves actually had the effect of decreasing extended learner
participation (perhaps not surprisingly). Nassaji and Wells (ibid.:401) tentatively conclude:

...even sequences that start with known information questions can develop into a more equal dialogue, if, in the follow-up move, the teacher avoids evaluation and instead requests justifications, connections or counter-arguments ... when this happens, of course, the initial IRF generic structure fades into the background and is replaced, temporarily, by a more conversation-like genre.

Cullen (2002: 119 - 120) makes a distinction between evaluative and discoursal roles of the F move, which he prefers to call “Follow-up” rather than “Feedback”. In evaluative follow-ups “the focus is on the form of the learner’s response: whether, for example, the lexical item or grammatical structure provided by the learner was acceptable or not.” The latter have the purpose “to pick up students contributions and to incorporate them into the flow of classroom discourse (Mercer 1995: 26), in order to sustain and develop a dialogue between the teacher and the class: the emphasis is thus on content rather than form of the student’s R-move, although the teacher may give implicit feedback by reformulating the utterances in a linguistically more acceptable form.”

### Task 9

Look through your classroom data. Try to find examples of the F-move and label them according to Cullen’s two categories.

Did you have any difficulties in doing this?

If you are interested in this area and wish to explore it further read Gattullo (2000) and Chen 2007, you could also go back to Makey and Silver (2005) that was included in the references for Unit 4.

### 8.7 Learner Roles in interaction

So far we’ve concentrated on teacher talk in classroom interaction and we’ve seen that teacher control may be functional to the pedagogic purpose of learning. However, in various units it has been pointed out that, according to many second language acquisition studies, in order to learn a language it is not enough to be exposed to it, it is also necessary to have opportunities to use the language in a meaningful way.
How do learners get to speak in the classroom? There are basically four ways:

1. The teacher nominates a particular learner to speak, as in example 5 above;
2. The teacher doesn’t nominate any particular learner after an initiation move. Learners either ‘bid for the floor’ in the form of, for example, raised hands, and the teacher then selects the speaker, or learners call out the answer. Example 1 shows this;
3. The teacher invites all the learners to respond together, as in Example 2;
4. The learner takes the initiative and self-selects, but not in response to the teacher.

Notice how in three out of four possibilities the control is firmly in the hands of the teacher. Again this is functional to the pedagogical purpose of learning (we would hardly want 30 children all trying to speak at once). However, it does deny learners any form of practice in managing turn-taking mechanisms.

Counihan (1998) argues that we should teach students to interact, not just talk and provides some practical tips to this end based on limiting the teacher’s controlling role to allow a more direct communication among students.

Young learners sometimes “initiate” when they want to say something which has nothing to do with the work that is going on in the class at that moment. There are times in which they do this in L1 and times in which they use L2. An example of the former would be the following:

Example 8

001 Teacher  have you finished?--- everybody finished
002 Daniel  teacher – teacher ---
003 Teacher  what do you want Daniel?
004 Daniel  may I go to the toilet please?
005 Teacher  yes --- okay -- but no one else --- wait for the break

This example also reinforces the point made in the previous unit about the usefulness of teaching classroom language in the form of unanalysed lexical phrases. Learners have little or no possibility in the classroom to practise such important conversational skills as speaker change, topic change and so on. Equipping them with useful phrases relevant to classroom routines may be one way of enabling them to practise their turn-taking skills.
Listen to the teacher-fronted activities in your data again.

- Can you find any instances of children making Initiations themselves (i.e. speaking but not in response to the teacher)?
- What is the purpose of their Initiations?
- What language do the children use when they make Initiations?
- How does the Teacher react to them?
- Can you think of any other ways of encouraging more learner initiative?

In terms of the content of children’s responses, so far we have seen examples of children answering the teacher’s questions but even within the limits of an IRF sequence, there may be alternatives.

 Particularly with low level YLs, the teacher may design his or her turn in order to elicit a non-verbal response. In T.P.R. activities, for example, the response does not require any speaking but consists of actions of some kind. The following is an example of the use of a nonverbal response to check learner understanding.

Example 9

001 Teacher okay am I right or am I wrong – listen and remember
002 two claps wrong – one clap right – now listen
003 carefully – I know I’m right ---- okay – today’s
004 Monday – am I right?
005 Children (one clap)
006 Teacher it’s sunny today
007 Children (two claps)
008 Teacher very good it’s not sunny – it’s raining ---- this is Anna
009 Children (one clap)
010 Teacher this is Lea
011 Children ( two claps )
012 Teacher oh oh silly me – this is Maria ------

In the YL classroom, especially in the early stages, the R move may frequently consist of choral repetitions. These have the advantage of giving all the children the chance to produce certain language forms without the risk of loss of face and may be particularly useful in practising formulaic utterances or lexical chunks.

Example 10

Written by Sue Garton
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
Before we go any further, I’d like to make an important point about pedagogical purpose. Many articles about classroom interaction present samples from classrooms, usually one which is more ‘structured’ and one which is more ‘communicative’. The comparison which follows invariably condemns the structured interaction and praises the communicative interaction. However, there is little point in judgements of this type without a consideration of the pedagogical purpose of the activity. If a teacher aims to teach a particular item of grammar, then a more controlled form of interaction may be entirely appropriate (we may wish to question the usefulness of teaching grammatical structures, but that is another issue altogether).

That said, most of the examples of interaction that we have seen so far are noticeable for the way in which the learner has the mainly passive role of responding to the teacher, usually with very short utterances, while the opportunities for meaningful communication are extremely restricted. The point was made in the previous unit that with very young learners in particular it may be counterproductive to insist on language production too early in the child’s learning experience, but even so, there are some important questions we need to ask ourselves:

- To which extent does this sort of interaction match with content-based approaches and the fact that children seem to learn L2 more easily when it represents something concrete they can refer to or when it is used to communicate something meaningful for them?
- To which extent does it respond to young learners’ affective and social needs?
- How can the teacher’s obvious role of mediator between learners and subject also embrace that of promoter of a variety of interaction patterns, developing the learners’ interactive competence?

There are obviously no clear-cut answers to these questions but they are offered for reflection and by way of introduction to the second part of this section that is concerned with options aimed at developing learners’ initiative and at giving them more opportunities for communication within the school institutional setting where the teacher and the learners inevitably have different roles. The issue is not to give the teacher and learners “equal rights” but how the teacher might manage the interaction to foster more extended learner participation in the development of classroom discourse.
8.8 Alternative interaction patterns

We have seen that interaction patterns should be functional to the aims of a particular activity and that there is undoubtedly an important place for teacher control over interaction in teacher-fronted activities. However, we have seen too that teachers tend to overwhelmingly dominate this type of classroom organisation, which in itself still tends to represent the majority of lesson time. Yet if learners are to get the most out of teacher-fronted interaction, we need to explore ways in which this can be varied in order to promote more meaningful communication. We already hinted at some of the ways this might be done in the section on teacher follow-up.

Johnson (1995:45) maintains that in order to create more opportunities for learner participation in the learning process, it is necessary for teachers to allow for greater variability in the patterns of communication. This means that teachers must become aware of:

Their cultural beliefs, assumptions, and expectations about who they are as teachers, what role they believe teachers should play in second language instruction, what they expect of their students, and the ways in which they judge the appropriateness of their own and their students’ communicative behaviour in classrooms. (ibid: 146).

One way of increasing learner participation is by encouraging and exploiting learner initiative, i.e. allowing learners to take control of the interaction by introducing their own topics or developing the current topic in a way that interests them. By taking the initiative, learners can direct the interaction in such a way that it responds more closely to their needs and at the same time develop their conversational management skills. What is more, it creates a more dialogic classroom in which learners are valued as co-constructors of knowledge (Nystrand, 1997). See how the following example shows an orientation towards this goal.

The teacher had told a nine year old EFL class the story “the lonely child and the troll” and had just announced that the following activity would be performing the story. The roles in the original text were: trees and animals in the forest, a child (girl) and her mother, a troll (boy) and his mother. Some parts had already been assigned before the excerpt of example 11.

Example 11 (R. Balbi: unpublished data)

001 Teacher Fine and… who wants to be the child’s mother?
002 Sonia Io io [me me]
Task 11

Analyse the extract of example 11 and try to describe what happens on a turn-by-turn basis. Look in particular at the way roles are performed.

In the above extract the teacher shows genuine interest in the learners’ contributions to the extent that she modifies the original story according to the children’s suggestions (in this particular story, adding fathers does not change the development of the story line as the parent or parents just listen to their “child” telling about who s/he had met in the forest, ask some questions and finally make a reassuring comment). What interests us here is the development of the interaction that shows how, while being open to the children’s proposals, at the same time the teacher fulfils her role of “instructor”; in fact she uses English also when she responds to utterances in L1, and partially rewords what the children say in L1 or in incorrect English (see 005, 008 and 013). The move in 010 and 011 seems to have a twofold purpose: summarizing what has been agreed and providing input for the learners to use when elicited to complete the description of the new situation.

Task 12

Read “Being the Teacher: Identity and Classroom Conversation” (Richards, 2006): The article refers to adult classes and it is obvious that conversations between adults are different from conversations between adults and children and children. Taking this for granted, what insights could we draw with reference to young learners?

This fascinating article by Richards (2006:72) develops the distinction between “default” identities and “transportable” identities. The former refers to the
interactional pattern typically associated with a particular context; for example, classroom discourse traditionally sees the teacher as initiator and controller and students as respondents trying to provide the expected answers. The latter implies a modification of these relationships that has a noticeable impact on the development of discourse to the point that it shares the characteristics of ordinary conversation. With reference to YLs, I (Rita) would envisage that, especially with the 9-12 age groups, this might lead to a more extended exploitation of role plays in which learners construct imaginary identities and talk to each other according to their interpretation of those identities instead of responding to the teachers’ initiations. An unpublished video tape collecting some of the activities of classes within the Socrates Lingua 2 Project 110147–CP–1–2003–1– DE–LINGUA–L2PP shows how different children interpreted the same roles with a personal touch and gave a natural flavour to their performance of a picture story with a pre-determined outline. The children were asked to work in groups and role-play a picture story (with no text) where a clown was ready for the show but couldn’t find his big red nose and asked various people in the circus where it was until it was found on the elephant’s trunk. Different children interpreted the same roles in different ways: in some cases the respondents were kind and cooperative while in others they showed their annoyance for being interrupted by the clown’s request of help. One even said: Go away! You can do your number even without your nose! This is not a full example of what Richards describes as real conversations are not prepared in groups and then performed but it reminds us of Saricoban’s suggestion (1995:5) that what we do in the classroom “should be as close as possible to a slice of life”.

Richards’s insights also imply that the ‘learner identity’ is only one of many that children bring to class. These other identities provide valuable learning opportunities when sensitively exploited by the teacher. For example, many young learners have hobbies and interests, often knowing a good deal more than their teachers and other learners on particular subjects. They will also have strong likes and dislikes often about aspects of modern culture. Teachers can draw on learner identities as ‘expert’ or ‘music/football/fashion lover’ to give learners English language practice. An example of this might be a conversation about or a survey of the local football championship or about the most popular music groups. Of course, the topic by itself is not a guarantee of an orientation towards real conversation but it is a facilitating factor. Games are another opportunity for role exploitation: in this case, the children’s role is that of players. (See example 12).

Example 12 (R. Balbi: unpublished data)

In a third primary class, the teacher showed partially covered pictures with the O.H.P. The children had to guess what the hidden items were.
In this activity, learners are game players, using English to solve a puzzle. The game encourages engagement with learning. The teacher is then able to use a variety of strategies to support the children’s development of discourse skills, for example, showing sincere interest in and responding positively to pupils’ answers; using English at a level pupils can understand; helping pupils to express their messages; cueing to say more; relating talk to familiar contexts which are meaningful for pupils; and working in partnership with pupils to achieve a common goal (Moon 2005:71). The importance of encouraging learners to want to talk through topics that allow the expression of personal ideas, experiences and feelings is supported also by the analysis of data from YLs doing various activities (Cameron 2001: Chapter 3).

So far most of the consideration has been given to what happens during ordinary lessons. We have seen that alternative discourse patterns can be fostered by activities that per se develop according to different interaction patterns: examples are those in which learners are encouraged to construct knowledge through inquiry practices (Kutz, 1991), show and tell sessions, sharing circles, information gap activities, question time, some games, the collective invention of stories and poems. (Interaction, it should also be noted, is influenced by the seating arrangement as it may support or hinder listening and involvement and contribute to an atmosphere of
classroom cohesion or fracture.) All the activities so far discussed have been teacher-fronted and controlled. We will now move on to discuss interaction in pair and group work.

8.9 Group Work

No matter how well designed teacher-fronted interaction is in promoting learner participation, there remains the problem of giving all learners in the classroom a number of opportunities to speak. It has been calculated that in a fifty minute secondary school class of 30 students, where about 60% of the class time is taken up by teacher-fronted interaction, each student has approximately 30 seconds of speaking time (Long & Porter, 1985). The solution that has been proposed to this problem is the use of group and pair work and it is to this that we now turn.

TASK 13
Before you go any further:

- In your experience, at what age are young learners able to cooperate with peers in pairs or groups?
- Make a list of what you consider to be the advantages and drawbacks of group work and pair work with children.
- If you’ve been able to record some examples of children working in pairs and groups, listen to the recording that you made. What evidence can you find for the advantages and drawbacks you listed?

Probably you have noticed that very young learners are not yet able to work properly in groups and very short pair work activities can be the first step towards learning to cooperate with peers. Besides, if learners are not accustomed to working in groups, they may experience a feeling of not knowing exactly what they are expected to do when they are confronted with group work in the EFL or ESL class. Even so, the advantages of group work (here including pair and small group work) compared to teacher-fronted interaction are well-known and can be summarised as follows:

- Group work gives greater opportunities for producing the target language as fewer people are competing for speaking time.
- The range of language functions used greatly increases in group work. Learners have the opportunity to ask questions, make requests and initiate exchanges, all of which are characteristic of adult-child communication outside the classroom but tend to be lacking in teacher-fronted interaction.
- In groups children can work at their own pace and level. They have more opportunities to negotiate comprehensible input and comprehensible output, both of which are deemed important in second language acquisition.
• Working in groups constitutes a less threatening environment in which to use language. As a result, children may be more willing to ‘have a go’, even if their ideas are not fully developed or if they are afraid of making mistakes. The advantages of group work are maximized in small groups (3/5 members). All of these factors contribute to greater motivation for learning.

An example of how learners may work together to construct interaction can be seen in the following example taken from Warren (1985), cited in Seedhouse (1999:151) where learners have a map of the same island but one of the maps has certain features missing. The learner with the complete map had to tell the other learner where to put the missing features.

Example 14

001 L1 The road from the town to Kampong Kelantan ... the
002 coconut=
003 L2 =Again, again
004 L1 The road is from the town to Kampong Kelantan
005 ((7.5))
006 L1 The town is in the Jason Bay
007 L2 Again. The town, where is the town?
008 L1 The town is on the Jason Bay
009 L2 The road?
010 L1 The road is from the town to Kampong Kelantan
011 ((11))
012 L1 OK?
013 L2 OK

In this example, there is evidence of negotiation of meaning and learner initiation. Moreover, the pauses are far longer than those normally found in teacher-fronted interaction, enabling the learners to work at their own pace.

However, these advantages are not inherent in group work; they still have to be created in some way. Two studies of group work among adult learners (Foster, 1998 and Pica, 1987) found that small groups may not actually be achieving the communication teachers desire. Pica’s study of decision-making activities in groups found that learners were not really required to interact (in terms of requests for clarification, confirmation and so on) in order to reach a decision. Moreover, a handful of learners tended to dominate, leading the discussion and effectively taking on the role of the teacher. Mehan and Griffin (1980:366) describe the example of a native speaker first grader, Mark, who not only took over the role of the teacher in group work by eliciting responses from his peers and evaluating them, but also

Written by Sue Garton
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
proved very adept at reasserting his control over the interaction when another child tried to take the initiative:

Example 1.5

001 Michael I know what the last one is
002 Mark What?
003 Michael Cream
004 Mark No. Gene?
005 Gene Umm, at.

Mark immediately turned Michael’s attempt at Initiation into an IRF sequence by offering his own initiation, leading to Michael’s response in line 003 and Mark’s subsequent negative evaluation and turn allocation to another child. In this way, he accepts Michael’s introduction of a new topic while at the same time maintaining his social identity as the teacher. As Mehan and Griffin (ibid: 367) note, many adult teachers might find Mark’s tactics useful!

Pica's (ibid.) conclusion is that, in using small group work, it is necessary to give learners an activity that requires them to exchange information rather than one that merely invites them to. Foster (1998), on the other hand, found that even tasks that require information exchange don’t necessarily mean that students talk more. This was because dominant learners tended to ask other group members yes/no questions in order to obtain the information needed, rather than wait for them to offer it. Moreover, the learners in Foster’s study made very little use of negotiation of meaning. As Pica (ibid.) points out, stopping interaction every time there is a problem in comprehension would make group tasks impossibly slow and probably be extremely irritating, not to mention the demotivating effect of having to admit continually that you haven’t understood. Among adults, the preferred strategy appeared to be what Foster (ibid: 19) calls the ‘pretend and hope’ strategy (pretend you’ve understood and hope that the on-going interaction will make things clear), rather than the ‘check and clarify’ strategy.

Two final points before we go on to look at designing tasks for group work. In your list of drawbacks, you may well have mentioned the risk that learners may learn each others mistakes. In fact, Lightbown and Spada (1999: 191) note that research shows little evidence of this happening and learners tend to produce the same number of errors whether they are speaking to learners at the same level, at a more advanced level or to native speakers. The drawback lies in the fact that when interacting with learners of the same level, information which may help to correct errors is not available.
Finally, if you work in a monolingual context, you almost certainly listed the fact that the learners speak in their first language among the drawbacks of group work. It is difficult to encourage even the most highly motivated adult to use the target language when interacting with others who share the same mother tongue, never mind children! Code-switching has already been discussed in the previous unit but it is worth following up that discussion briefly. Hancock (1997) investigated the language used in pair work among 14-17 year olds, all with the same L1. He found extensive use of Spanish (the learners’ L1) to talk about the task at hand and about the language itself. This corresponds closely to the discussion by Willis (1992) of Inner and Outer levels of classroom discourse:

... the Outer structure provides the framework of the lesson, the language used to socialize, organize, explain, and check, and generally to enable the pedagogic activities to take place. ...

The Inner language consists of the target forms of the language that the teacher has selected as learning goals. (ibid: 163).

This distinction usefully reflects the dual function of the language used in language classrooms as both the means of instruction and the subject of study. Instances of L1 use in data such as those of Hancock (and indeed some data of Sue Garton’s own data of adult Italian L1 speakers), mainly occur on the Outer level, showing that the division of classroom discourse into Outer and Inner seems to be a concrete distinction that learners are oriented to in their own language production.

However, it is on the Outer level that a lot of opportunities for meaningful communication are created. What is more meaningful in a language classroom than discussion of the task and the language at hand? If we accept that the negotiation of meaning is important in language learning, then using the target language in the Outer level from as early as possible may be one way of encouraging this. By not doing so, we may be depriving learners of important comprehensible input and output opportunities. This takes us back again to the discussion above and in the previous unit about the potential usefulness of presenting examples of classroom language as unanalysed chunks, especially at early levels, which can be broken down and analysed at a more advanced stage of language learning. It is necessary, nevertheless, to strike a balance between the potential usefulness of using the L2 on the Outer level for comprehensible input and the importance of allowing the use of the L1 for affective reasons, such as group cohesion or supporting weaker students.

Many of the drawbacks in pair and group work that have been noted above can be overcome or at least minimised by the careful consideration of how teachers can best help learners to work together and to develop the variety of communicative strategies that are needed to complete different types of tasks.
Task 14

Do one of the following at your choice

Read Carless 2002 and note what he has to say on the following:

• How learners responded to task work affectively and linguistically
• The problems identified in the experience described
• The suggestions for optimizing the results of task work.

Do the teachers’ attitudes mirror any of yours?

Read Long (1977) and:
• Compare your experience to his in the first three pages of the article
• List insights you gain from the second part.

8.9 Written Interaction

The vast majority of this unit has been concerned with oral interaction. This is quite simply because, when we talk about classroom interaction, we normally mean the oral interaction that takes place between the participants in the classroom setting. With reference to what happens in the classroom, I (Rita) would argue that while oral work can be described according to some kind of interaction model, be it IRF or any other, it is more difficult to identify patterns to describe written interaction both in and outside the classroom. With reference to the classroom some written work such as write the names of five objects you can find in the kitchen could be seen as a response to a teacher’s Initiation, while other activities would imply a different kind of interaction between a writer and a reader.

Task 15

Which of the following written activities could be considered “interactive” in as far as it implies the existence of at least two participants reacting to each other? Give reasons for your choices.

1. Writing a letter or an email to an imaginary pen-pal to introduce yourself
2. Writing a Christmas card to the head of the school
3. Describing a picture
4. Writing a letter to a young people’s magazine
5. Writing a birthday card to a peer celebrating his/her birthday
6. Writing a text to send to a site where they publish children’s contributions
7. Writing a dialogue *at the Pizza Hut*
8. Writing an invitation to other classes to visit an exhibition organized by the class
9. Writing the programme of a show
10. Answering a letter whose text is in the book
11. Writing a letter to a famous person.

Probably you have noticed that for some of the above activities (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 11) what makes the difference is the level of authenticity. Does the peer in activity 5 really have a birthday, or is this merely a practice exercise? Other activities have a writer but no reader, except, maybe, the teacher who reads them in order to assess (an IRF pattern again). Others provide practice of real life tasks but are not interactive such as answering a letter in the textbook. In others the writer may never get to know how the readers have reacted (for example: writing a letter to a young people’s magazine).

So how can purposeful written interaction be implemented in the language classroom? The essential condition is a sense of audience. If learners can write to someone (teacher or peers) who will then respond to the content the writing becomes more than a practice exercise. Writing can be done with pen and paper or computers depending on the context and the resources available.

The forms of written interaction that can be implemented with traditional written modalities may be allowing children to write to the teacher at regular intervals and replying to what they have written, encouraging them to ask questions and asking questions yourself. Below is an example taken from a learner diary written by an 11 year old child in Turkey (Gwillim-Ozkaya, 2001). The teacher noted how, at the start, many children tended to play safe and write what looked like a series of sentence patterns or ‘display‘ language. As they became more familiar with this form of interaction, they showed an increasing awareness of their audience, clarifying things and introducing topics new to the audience. They also increasingly acknowledge and follow-up the teacher’s entries. The example here is also notable for the way in which the learner picks up a topic presumably introduced earlier by the teacher, (going to Erzurum), follows it up and then introduces their own sub-topic (going to Malatya).

Example 15
19 April
Dear Dorothy,
Hello;
I don’t get tired at the weekend doing all this training
Why did you go to Erzurum very early? I think is in the week the first snow came to Erzurum. This winter Erzurum was warm. Did you like there? I think is your husband’s family is there. Maybe you went to
Erzurum because of your children. I don’t know. Could you write it in your next letter? Why did you go?
I have never been to Erzurum. My grandfather’s family live in Malatya. Have you ever been Malatya? I hope you have been there. Because there is a beautiful city. There were lots of gardens, mountain I have been to Malatya twice.
On Sunday (18th April)
Today is a very important day for Turkey because of the election. We went my aunt for watch election report. We stayed for one day. I played game with my cousins and their computer. I slept too late.
Love, Goodbye, Best wishes, Bye

In this kind of activity, the roles of teachers and learners appear at least more equal and anything can be a possible topic of “conversation”. Shy children may express in writing things they would never say in front of the whole class. Other interactive activities would imply written communication between learners, ranging from birthday cards to exchanging messages. What is more, the asynchronous nature of this interaction gives learners plenty of time to process what they write and read and to use dictionaries and other resources to construct and deconstruct what they write and read.

For older young learners who can already read and write a little, computer mediated communication (CMC) can be both motivating and authentic, particularly if it involves writing to other users of English around the world. Email clubs and chat rooms can provide the channels for this kind of communication, although vigilance and care must be exercised by teachers who instigate such activities. In Europe, CMC has been enormously expanded within the E-Twinning Project accessible to schools of all levels within the European Community. Most of the messages are in English as this is the only common language for the majority of the participants.

The results of research on both synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated writing and their impact on interaction and language learning with adult students are described in Warschauer (1997). Taking the importance of interaction and negotiation in language learning as a starting point, he cites research which indicates a great number of similarities between oral and computer-mediated interaction. Of course, this is a new field and it is premature to make any real claims about the transferability of written interaction skills to oral interaction, or vice versa. However, he does make some interesting points.

As we saw at the beginning of this unit, the role of input in language learning is based on the idea that comprehension is necessary for acquisition and that modified input brought about by negotiation of meaning is beneficial to acquisition. Warschauer
describes research which shows that in carrying out tasks through synchronous electronic discussion, the same patterns of negotiation of meaning can be found as in face-to-face interaction. For example, the type of negotiation of meaning, the effect of task type on interaction. According to his findings, “the computer-mediated feature of online writing has finally unleashed the interactive power of text-based communication” (ibid: 472) and electronic discussion is claimed to be “a good bridge between writing and speaking skills, with the strengths of each domain apparently helping each other” (Ibid: 474).

Another factor which is assumed to be beneficial to acquisition is when learners notice the language they are exposed to, i.e. that they become conscious of it (Truscott and Sharwood Smith, 2004). In computer-mediated written interaction, learners see the language they are exposed to and are and this may mean that they are more likely to notice it and incorporate it into their own language production.

Warschauer highlights how synchronous communication allows students to practise rapid interaction and, at the same time, to pause and reflect on their texts. According to output theories, being given opportunities to produce language increases fluency and accuracy and, given planning time, allows learners to achieve higher levels of complexity.

With reference also to the older group of young learners we should also consider whether synchronous communication is realistically feasible. The following task will help you to reflect on this.

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<th>Task 16</th>
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<td>Answer the following questions:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do you find these arguments in favour of computer-mediated written interaction convincing? Are they applicable to young learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you think of any oral interaction skills which are clearly NOT practised in this form of interaction?</td>
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While any experience in which learners have the opportunity to use the target language is likely to develop their general competence, strategies and confidence to some extent, it is important that the differences between oral and written interaction are not underestimated. A risk with young learners, who are often “beginners”, might be that a strong focus on the written word makes them dependant on it at the expense of developing aural and oral skills.

Before concluding this section, it is worth mentioning two research reports exploring oral interaction with children engaged in a collaborative written task in English L1:
Vass (2002) and Chung and Walsh (2006). The former identifies discourse patterns in a situation in which collaborating children writers engaged in talk to cope with a written task using computers. The latter deals with the nature of peer collaboration and the learning opportunities provided by peer discourse with kindergartners’ and first graders’ participating in a computer writing project. Try to read both if you are thinking of researching young learners’ development of writing skills or use of CMC.

8.10 Looking ahead

This Unit has introduced you to some aspects of interaction in the context of young learners’ classroom and hopefully your work on the recordings has made you aware of your role, and the learners’, in shaping interaction; probably this has also been for you an opportunity to experiment with unfamiliar research methods (unless you have already taken ASI). Are there any aspects of your own classroom interaction that you might like to investigate further with a view to developing your skills?

An assignment based on this unit will describe an investigation you have undertaken into an aspect of classroom interaction in your own context. This will involve the collection and analysis of data and, particularly in the case of oral interaction, will require a certain amount of attention to research methodology. For this reason, if you choose to focus on this area of TYL, you are strongly advised to take the ASI module and study it in conjunction with this one. The ASI module would give you the appropriate research tools that you could then use to explore interaction in the TYL context.

If you are interested in researching written interaction, you should try to find a specific focus rather than set your focus too widely. Developing interactive writing skills is generally under-researched in the YL literature and so your contribution would be valuable.

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Appendix A

Lightbown and Spada, 2006: 109 – 114;

See your Module Blackboard

Appendix B

From Wong – Fillimore (1985:49)

**Structural Characteristics of Lessons that Worked Well for Language Learning**

They were formal lessons with clear boundaries:

- Boundaries marked by changes in location, props
- Beginnings and endings marked by formulaic cues

They were regularly scheduled events

- Scheduled time for activity
- Scheduled place for activity

Clear lesson format across groups, from day to day - ‘Scripts’

- Clear instructions, lesson phases clearly marked

Clear and fair turn-allocation procedures for student participation
- Lots of turns for each student
- Systematic turn-allocation used at least some of the time
- A variety of responses invited or elicited

**Characteristics of Teacher Talk that Works as Input**

Clear separation of languages – no alternation or mixing
Comprehension emphasized – focus is on communication:
• Use of demonstration, enactment to convey meaning
• New information presented in context of known information
• Heavy message redundancy

Language used is entirely grammatical – appropriate to activity:

• Simpler structures used, avoidance of complex structures
• Repeated use of same sentence patterns or routines
• Repetitiveness, use of paraphrases for variation

Tailoring of elicitation questions to allow for different levels of participation from students.

Richness of language use, going beyond books, playfulness

Appendix C
Further examples of data extracts with Boundary and Teaching Exchanges

Example 1

001 Teacher  (Boundary) (frame) so (focus) now you are going to write down
002 some of the things we know about Easter ------
003 (frame) okay – (I – directive) take out you exercise books
004 Children (R – non verbal)
005 Teacher  (focus) and we’re going to write Easter and then we’ve
006 got Easter Bunny and then ----and ----- 
007 (I – elicitation) what are these?
008 Children (R) ---hot cross buns-------
009 Teacher  (F ) --hot cross buns

In this extract we can see examples of both Frame and Focus moves. Notice too, how in the teacher’s F slot, the positive evaluation of the learners’ response is implicit in the fact that she repeats the response without comment. Again this is a typical feature of classroom discourse.

Example 2
The children in this extract are only 4-5 years old, thus the teacher initiation takes the form of a directive that doesn’t require a verbal response. Notice too how in line 003 the teacher asks a question, and we have to consider if this has the function of a directive or of an elicitation. In other words, is a question always an elicitation? And does the fact that the children respond by taking their book out of their bag constitute a verbal surrogate or a non-verbal action? This example perhaps shows the limits of this type of labelling, as does the following:

Example 3 - The teacher has been encouraging the children to make sustained oral presentations about themselves and here they are practising this.

001 Teacher (Frame) okay now—[Singing] (I – directive) show me your book – your book – your book – show me your book – that’s in your bag --- where’s your book?
005 (R) (Children take out book – lots of mother tongue talk)
006 Teacher (F) Okay – good -
008 Teacher (frame) now— [Singing] (I – directive) show me your pencil box – your pencil box your pencil box show me your pencil box ----- let me see your pencil box
011 Children (R – non-verbal)
013 Teacher Teacher (F) good – 1 2 3 – good
In line one, the teacher’s I slot takes the form of a command and yet the response is clearly verbal. So do we classify this as a directive or an elicitation? In fact, Willis (1992) proposed introducing a further category of Exchange for the language classroom, which is the Direct: verbal.

Appendix D

Observing language classrooms

If you wish to go into more depth into classroom interaction or if you would like to do an assignment in this area, you will probably want to observe and record some classes. The issues involved in this are discussed in detail in the IIC module and you are strongly advised to do that module first or in conjunction with this one. In the meantime, however, you might like to read Allwright and Bailey (1991:69-70) who explain very clearly the ethical and psychological issues involved in classroom observation and the pressures it may place on teachers and learners. As you know, Aston requires that you seek ethics clearance for any research that you do leading to submitted work for your degree and Allwright and Bailey will help you to consider the kind of issues you will need to address.

Unfortunately, observation has a rather bad reputation (not altogether undeserved) among teachers because of its traditional association with evaluation of teacher performance. Allwright and Bailey point out that:

In some instances it appears that teachers are more nervous with visitors than are learners. In a sense the learners are already giving public performances in class anyway, but the observer may be perceived as posing an unusual threat to the teacher’s power base (ibid.:69)

Although there is no easy solution to this problem, some basic precautions can be taken.

- If you are observing another teacher’s lessons, think carefully about how you are going to explain the reasons for wanting to observe him/her. If you explain too much, then the teacher may try to control what he or she is doing. If you explain too little, he/she may be wary and try to second guess your reasons for observing. Covert research is not acceptable and you must endeavour to be as honest as you can. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) give some excellent advice about ethics which they strongly link to the issue of validity in research (see, Eisenhart M. and Howe

- Always give an explanation for the presence of an observer to the children too.
- It is important to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity as far as possible and to specify what you will be using the data for and ask for permission to use it. You need to get written consent for this.
- Nervousness can be reduced by making repeated visits to the classroom so that the presence of an observer becomes a normal part of the lesson for both teachers and children.
- Always be available for both teachers and learners if they have any questions or if they are curious about what you’re doing.

Whatever the precautions taken, it must always be remembered that the presence of a non-participant observer, or even only of a tape-recorder, will inevitably lead, to some extent, to an alteration of normal behaviour, to what Labov (1972, cited in Allwright and Bailey, ibid.:71) calls ‘the observer’s paradox’, the fact that an observer goes into a particular context to collect ‘naturally-occurring’ data, but his or her presence in the context in some way inevitably alters the behaviour of the participants, making it ‘unnatural’. Allowances must therefore always be made for this.

Recording

According to van Lier (1988:37), audio/video recording of classrooms is particularly important because although on the one hand we know little about what really goes in the classroom, on the other:

... the classroom is not an exotic setting for us but rather a very familiar one, laden with personal meaning. Recording as an estrangement device is thus extremely vital.

The availability of recordings also means that data can be repeatedly examined.

On a purely practical level, always test out recording equipment first. Classrooms are notoriously difficult to record with so many things happening at once and so many people talking at once. It may take a bit of practice to find the right place for the machine in the classroom. If you’re interested in teacher-fronted activities, consider using a clip-microphone attached to a walkman that the teacher can put in his or her pocket. If you want to record group or pair work, make sure the tape recorder is in the middle of the group but a safe distance from other groups to limit interference. Finally, it’s a good idea to back up recordings with field notes where you can write down any interesting non-verbal behaviours, such as where the teacher is standing at any given moment, facial expressions, gestures and so on.
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TYL 9

Course and Syllabus Design

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading
   Core reading
   Recommended reading

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Approaches to the syllabus
   9.2.1 Syllabus types

9.3 The process of course design
   9.3.1 Defining the Context
   9.3.2 Articulating Beliefs
   9.3.3 Formulating Goals and Objectives
   9.3.4 Conceptualizing content
   9.3.5 Putting it all together

9.4 Further considerations

9.5 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Appendix G
Appendix H
Appendix I

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May 2008
Goals

The aim of this unit is to explore various principles and approaches to course and syllabus design with reference to young learners and to evaluate them according to criteria of suitability and effectiveness taking into account both teacher’s and learners’ needs.

By the end of this unit you should

- be informed about a variety of approaches to syllabus design and be able to identify their features and how they affect the teacher’s role
- be aware of the criteria to consider in the evaluation of a syllabus for a specific context
- be able to understand the process of syllabus and course design
- be able to design a syllabus or a course for your class or a wider target

Reading

Core reading


Recommended Reading

- Graves, K. 2000. Designing Language Courses. Newbury House (any chapter whose content you wish to explore)
9. 1 Introduction

This Unit tries to provide some guiding principles for designing a comprehensive framework to organize a course for the teaching of English to young learners. We will start with a reference to how the terms curriculum, syllabus and course are generally used even if most probably you are already familiar with these concepts, especially if you have taken the CMD module. If you have taken the CMD module, this will be an opportunity for you to exploit your general knowledge of this issue with reference to the TYL context which is only marginally referred to in that module. This introduction will define the approach adopted and Task 1 will elicit a reflection on your relationship with your syllabus in the YL context.

With reference to the definitions, we follow Nunan in that a curriculum “is concerned with planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programmes” (Nunan 1988: 8). A syllabus, on the other hand, derives from a curriculum and is the aspect of the implementation of a curriculum specifying what to teach for each subject. The decision of teaching English and/or other languages is taken at curricular level. The description of what learners are expected to learn is taken at syllabus level. Having said this, two preliminary observations are needed before going any further: one is that later in the unit you will be confronted with other definitions of “syllabus”. The other is that the terms syllabus and curriculum are sometimes used interchangeably as you might have gathered from reading some of the literature on these topics.

A course is a series of lessons to be taught in a determined time-frame such as a week, a semester, a school year and it implies too choices about the adoption of methodologies and materials. The same syllabus can be the basis for different courses.

Curricula and syllabi change as a result of social and political policies. With regard to YLs, the most evident expression of this trend is the progressive extension of “early English”. (See Unit 1). YLs are also affected by linguistic and learning theories, pedagogies, and the availability of resources. Syllabi developed for private and state education are a case in point. You may have noticed that these syllabi are inspired by different principles and developed to respond to different needs and different stakeholders, even if they operate in the same cultural context.

In the following sessions we will first consider some issues concerning syllabus and then move to course design. The reason for this approach is that we need to consider
two different perspectives: one is the situation in which the course designer and the teacher are the same person so that the teacher is able to plan with a particular group of learners in mind. The latter is when the syllabus designers and the deliverers of the course are not conflated; for example, in state schools where, syllabus design is considered a specialist activity often entrusted to a team of “experts”. We think that being informed about and reflecting on the options involved in syllabus design could help both groups and should be the model that all working with syllabus and course design should move towards.

As conclusion to this section, Task 1 aims at fostering the awareness of the influence of the syllabus on your teaching by asking you to reflect on how you use it.

**Task 1**

Consider the impact of the syllabus on your teaching; if it is the case, make a distinction between teaching YLs and other ages. Which of the following is closer to your experience? (You can, of course, choose more than one). The syllabus is:

- Something you ignore systematically as any fixed syllabus is contrary to the principles of language teaching
- A guideline reminding you of useful items to teach
- A constraint as it makes you teach a ready-made packet
- A resource to adapt according to the needs and level of each group of learners
- A source of tension as time is not enough to teach all that is listed in the syllabus.

A teacher’s reaction to the syllabus often depends on the combination of two things: the teacher’s beliefs about learning and teaching language, and the quality of the syllabus. We will return to the importance of this later in the unit.

**9.2 Approaches to the syllabus**

As anticipated in the introduction we will dedicate the first part of our journey to the exploration of various ways of defining a syllabus, and the first activity will be a task.

**Task 2**

Before reading any further, write down your own definition of syllabus and make suggestions about the features an ideal syllabus for young learners should contain. Compare your ideas with those in Appendix A.

- In your opinion, is there anything that a syllabus for YLs should contain in particular?
- Is there anything missing from the ideas given?
Go back to Appendix A1 and identify what the teacher’s role is with reference to the concept of syllabus embedded in each definition. Compare your answers with those in Appendix B.

In doing Task 2, you may have noticed that a syllabus is also an implicit or explicit invitation for the teacher to adopt a methodology consistent with the approach to language and language learning inspiring the syllabus. In these cases “the distinction between syllabus design (specifying the what) and methodology (specifying the how)” is rather blurred (Nunan 1988: 52). With reference to this last observation, there is a narrow view drawing a clear distinction between syllabus design, exclusively concerned with the selection and grading of content, and, a broader view, sustaining that this is impossible when communication is at stake (Ibid: 5).

9.2.1 Syllabus types

The classic terminology defining approaches to syllabus design is found in Wilkins (1976). Starting from the concept that the differences in organizing courses are a reflection of “different ways of looking at the objectives of language learning and teaching” (ibid:1), he distinguishes between “synthetic” and “analytic” approaches while admitting that “any actual course or syllabus could be placed somewhere on the continuum between the wholly synthetic and the wholly analytic, but the actual decision procedures that have been followed in the process of selection will show that it tends towards one pole or the other” (ibid: 1 - 2). The synthetic approach is characterized by the separate teaching of the different parts of the target language and the gradual accumulation of the parts by learners, whose task is then to make a synthesis of the various smaller pieces, for which he uses the image of “building blocks”. The analytic approach allows for a more holistic and varied exposure to the target language, which is not rigidly graded and has a focus on the purposes of language learning. The learners’ subsequent task is to analyse specific aspects of the language encountered. Although Wilkins wrote his discussion of syllabus in the seventies, much of what he describes continues to resonate with course designers in the twenty first century.

A syllabus can also be described according to the model of learning adopted and this leads to the distinction between a transmission model and a transactional model. The learner is viewed, respectively, either as a receiver of what the teacher transmits or as an active participant in the teaching/learning process. (Weaver, 1994). We can see a clear link between synthetic and analytic approaches and transmission and transactional models of learning. For instance, although the transmission model has a non-linguistic base and the synthetic syllabus is rooted in a linguistic tradition, both, imply a particular view of the classroom:
• The teacher is the main actor and what counts is that the knowledge of a list of items is passed to learners and fixed outcomes are reached
• Learning is a linear process through which we learn one thing at a time
• Priority is given to the end product.

Similarly, the analytic syllabus and the transactional model affect teaching in the same way:
• The learner is the main actor and counts more than the subject to be learnt
• Learning is not linear and develops holistically
• The process is more important than the outcome.

If you are interested in reading more about the different ways in which syllabi have been categorised, you can either read the relevant units in the CMD module, or look at West (1994). What is more, the graphic representation of the approaches to syllabus design on page 7 of the CMD Module (See Appendix C) will help you to visualize some of the ideas in this section.

So far we have discussed syllabus in rather general terms. Task 3 will introduce you to the application of the general principles with reference to courses of English for young learners.

**Task 3**

Analyse the syllabus of a course for young learners you are familiar with and say if it is analytic or synthetic; try also to identify the learning model on which it is founded. Support your point of view with examples taken from the syllabus document.

How did you manage with Task 3? Was assigning a label easy or difficult? If it was difficult, what made it difficult? Was there one guiding principle or were there more? Were there any categories not included in the previous description? How might the concept of a continuum be of help?

9.3 The process of course design

So far we have focused on the syllabus. That is because the syllabus is central to any course design process and it is also the step that we are all concerned with, be it as syllabus designers, teachers who implement the syllabus or managers who oversee its implementation. However, designing a course clearly involves much more than just interpreting the syllabus and it is to this process that we now turn (although we will also return to the syllabus later).
In my opinion, Graves’s approach to course design (Graves, 2000) is the most complete and most pedagogically valid as it is based on the exploration of the needs of all the parties involved. It will be, with some adaptations, our framework for understanding the process of course design. We start, though, with an exploration of the factors that influence course design.

9.3.1 Defining the Context

The context in which the course takes place is highly influential: what may work well in one country may require a major adjustment somewhere else. For instance, in the European Union there have been attempts to standardise some aspects of language learning across the board for all member countries, for example, the Council of Europe has introduced the Common European Framework of Reference (CERF) to show equivalence of level between different language qualifications. But at the classroom level, standardisation has not usually been possible and most people would agree that it is not altogether desirable: stakeholders’ needs and wants vary from school to school within an area and unlikely to be best served by centralisation of goals nationally, never mind at European level.

Rixon (2000) discusses setting up a web site to record a variety of differences and similarities in YL teaching throughout the world. The complete survey is available on-line and working on it is a good introduction to the aspects to consider in defining the context. (See Task 4)

Task 4

Look at the survey by Rixon mentioned above at http://www.britishcouncil.org/worldwide_survey_of_primary_elt.pdf where you will find a copy of a questionnaire used to glean information about different countries in the world and the ‘state of play’ in each one.

Examine the questions in the questionnaire, select three that interest you particularly and which you believe may have an impact on course design, e.g. the age of the children (Q7), number of hours (Q9). Look at the available answers for two different countries you are familiar with or are interested in. How much do you learn about the courses taught in those countries from this questionnaire?

Graves (2000) suggests that there are three aspects to consider when focusing on the context of language learning:
Aston University
Teaching Young learners Unit 9

• people (learners, teachers, stakeholders)
• type of course (purpose, structure, other features)
• resources (time, equipment, materials)

These three aspects can be further broken down into a set of questions to be addressed when considering the context. As you read them, you may wish to prioritise them:

• Where does the course take place (child’s own classroom, in a language school?) and what hardware is available for its delivery (will video recorders be available, are tape recorders freely available, can teachers use a digital recorder for group recordings?).
• What course books and other resources are available in the school? Are teachers free to use them or not? Are children expected to have a course book?
• How do the different stakeholders view such resources and materials?
• How long is the course? Is it intensive, part-time, short, year-long? This has implications for how much recycling needs to be incorporated into the course design.
• How long are the lessons? This is important as younger children can not concentrate for as long as older children, as you saw in Unit 3.
• What are the ultimate goals of the course? For example, to activate previous language learning, to broaden it out, to prepare children for future learning, and so on. Are the goals determined by those teaching the course or others in a position of authority? How much say do those who teach the course have in shaping it? Are teachers and children ‘assessed’ on the achievement of the stated goals?
• Are the learners learning English as a second language or as a foreign language? Are they bilingual? (See Baker 2001; Scott 1991 for extensive discussion of issues connected with bilingualism).
• What theories and models of child development and language learning are prevalent in the context? For example, is a P-P-P approach considered to be ‘good’ methodology? Are children expected to work individually or work in pairs? Why? How much scope is there for individual teachers to change well-established routines and methods?
• How flexible is the course to be? Constable (1991), for instance, has put forward convincing arguments for doing away with a fixed syllabus in the YL English-medium context. However, for a variety of reasons this may not be desirable in some contexts.

Any teaching situation is a dynamic process. Different situations may be distinguished by certain external conditions such as the absence of an official syllabus or the existence of a strictly prescriptive one or the possibility of choosing...
one’s own materials or the obligation of using a specific textbook. Notwithstanding these variables, the teacher always has a mediating role between the syllabus and the learners and may reduce or increase the distance between the two in the same way as suggested by Prabhu (1989) for materials.

9.3.2 Articulating Beliefs

The above list is, by no means, exhaustive but touches on some of the considerations when exploring the context of YL language learning. However, as has been alluded to, the individual teacher may or may not have much say in how the course is designed.

Williams & Burden (1997), in their discussion of tasks, state that in some cases “the teacher’s views will not be embodied in the task design, but in the selection, the way in which the activity is actually presented… and the way in which the teacher mediates the various aspects of the task.” (ibid: 186). Do you think that a similar attitude might be of help also in the implementation of a course? Task 5 will be an opportunity for you to see where you stand about this issue and reflect on to which extent, in your experience, teachers are free to interpret courses in the same way that Williams & Burden (ibid.) believe tasks can be interpreted.

Task 5

Consider the following questions:

- Have you ever been in a situation where you found the design of the course you were teaching went against, in some way, your beliefs about learning?
- What aspects of the course were particularly restricting? For instance, did the course in some way limit the methodology you wished to use?
- Were you able to find a way of matching the restraints of the course design with your beliefs about language learning in the YL classroom? What were they and what evidence did you have to support your views rather than the course designers’?
- Did any aspects of the course help you to develop either your understanding of different pedagogies or knowledge about language learning?

Graves (2000:28) identifies four further factors that will affect course design:

1. views of language
2. views of the social context of language
3. views of learning and learners
4. views of teaching.

Our next step is to explore some of the possible options these four areas suggest.

Views of language

The following task will help you to explore how you look at language.

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<td>Which of the following views of language is closest to your own?</td>
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<td>Language is</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A system of grammar and phonetic rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lexis</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A social code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with others through the spoken word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other?</td>
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What would “knowing a language” consist of, according to each of the above views?

I don’t know your answers to the questions in the previous task but it is likely that you believe language to encapsulate elements from each description. However, some viewpoints will resonate with you more than others. So, if you believe knowledge about language (grammar/lexis) helps learners to use language (or if your learners have to do an exam that tests knowledge about language), then you’ll probably include structural elements in your syllabus. If you believe that the primary purpose of language is communication, then you will consider speaking and listening skills important. Whatever the case, your syllabus will nearly always integrate linguistic, pragmatic and social dimensions, defining a hierarchy among them based on learners’ needs and your own beliefs about language and learning.

Views of the social context of language
This refers to “adapting the language to fit the context” (Graves 2000: 29). For adult learners, the context can be well-defined: for example, learners may want to improve business communication skills, academic language skills, or conversational skills for travel purposes. For YLs, contexts may be less well defined and the learning context might well be confined to the classroom. Many courses for young learners list the understanding of both one’s own culture and that of the target language as a priority aim and this aspect is often mentioned in the governmental documents to justify early foreign language learning. But how much of this really finds space in materials and teaching and, if it does, what is the approach? This is a serious question for course and syllabus designers as defining both valuable and realistic goals in this area may be more challenging than defining purely linguistic goals.

Views of learning and learners

The third point concerns views about learning and learners. The cognitive and emotional features of young learners and their approach to learning have been covered extensively in Units 1-4 and have oriented the content of all the other units. The extracts from McKay (2006) in Task 7 will be an opportunity for you to revisit some of those ideas and then see how they affect course design.

Task 7

Read the extracts from McKay (2006: 5-9, 15-18) below and then look at the questions which follow.

Children bring to their language learning their own personalities, likes and dislikes and interests, their own individual cognitive styles and capabilities and their own strengths and weaknesses... Multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 1933) has suggested that children vary individually across eight types of intelligence... In early elementary grades, from age five to seven, children are continuing to learn from direct experience... Before they are eight years old, children do not find it easy to use language to talk about language... As children move into upper elementary grades they move towards more objective thought... Their need for love, security recognition and belonging accompanies a gradual shift from dependence on adults to peer group support and approval... Children’s contact with their peers expands greatly during their school years... At 11 to 13 years of age, they are beginning to manipulate thoughts and ideas but even at this age still need hands-on experiences. Their use of language has expanded to enable them to predict, hypothesize and classify. They are continuing to expand their understanding of cause and effect and are developing a sense of metaphor... As learning takes place over time, concepts are refined and awareness of relationships between concepts is extended.
Theories of learning in elementary education have moved from understandings that learning centres on the individual’s efforts, constructing knowledge through individual mental growth as a consequence of individual interaction with experience (Piaget, 1930) to a view of constructivist learning, in which knowledge is not constructed so much by the isolated learner but by the social group (Vygotsky, 1962) ... children learn through a two-way communication of ideas with other people, with other children with peers and teachers... Learning is seen as an active process, in which children interact with others and also with their environment and concrete materials within it... scaffolding support is help which will enable learners to accomplish a task which they would not have been quite able to manage on their own... Gaining knowledge involves a continuous process and learning takes place when children have an opportunity to visit and revisit knowledge in new contexts and over time.

Do you think that McKay’s description of YLs and of how they learn reflects your experience with them? If not, how would you modify it?

Think of the situation in which you are operating at present with reference to young learners (class teacher or other). What are the implications of what McKay says for course design in your context? Jot down 2-3 ideas.

The first observation that comes to my mind is that the term ‘Young Learners’ might be too broad to encapsulate this group of learners. A syllabus for pre-school children needs to be considerably different from one for those who are very close to their teens. My second observation is that rates of development and maturity obviously affect how YLs can cope with different approaches to language learning. The syllabus designer is only able to take very general information about the age group’s stage of development, typical behaviour patterns and interests and hobbies to the design process. It is the class teacher who knows learners individually and who can predict whether a particular approach or topic will be effective with each learner or not.

Views of teaching

Views of teaching are closely connected to beliefs about language, learners and learning and your own views could be articulated through the answers to some basic questions:

- Which of the following would you consider more appropriate for your target group? An inductive or a deductive approach?
- Do you teach language systems or language use?
- Rank the following in terms of importance in language learning: cognition, emotion, socialisation.
In what ways do you accommodate your teaching to different learning styles, if at all?
What media do you use in class (voice, course book, video, ICT, audio?)
Is negotiation realistic with YLs?
Are YLs able to work independently?

I would argue that with young learners the how is as important as the what, if not more important, and the effectiveness of a syllabus is strongly influenced by the answers to the questions above.

We are all aware of the possible divergence between what we do in class and our personal theory of teaching. Making that theory explicit might be a way of finding out where we stand on the various continua, for example, between the teacher as dispenser of knowledge and teacher as facilitator, between learners as autonomous and dependent, and between exploiting traditional teaching materials and exploiting the new media. In the case of an externally designed syllabus, the view of teaching should be clearly articulated so that teachers understand the reasons behind the choices made. Of course, the syllabus designer’s view may not coincide with that of the prospective users of the syllabus as it may be too innovative or too traditional and it may mean that teachers find the syllabus demotivating or just unsuitable for a specific situation. In some cases, the new syllabus may demand a wholesale change of long established routines, which is rarely successfully implemented.

At this point you are advised to read Loukia, 2006, reporting about how a mismatch between the official syllabus and the teacher’s beliefs based on the children’s needs was tackled in the Greek context. It is a hands-on experience, but it is grounded on sound theoretical principles.

In the previous sections, we have explored some of the main influences on course design. In this section we move back to the more practical and look at some of the steps involved in actually designing a course. For convenience sake, we explore them in separate sections, but this shouldn’t be taken to mean that it is a linear process—it is very much a reiterative one.

9.3.3 Formulating Goals and Objectives
Some of the problems regarding the definition of goals for children’s courses have been anticipated in 1.4 where a distinction was made between English as a second or additional language and English as a foreign language.

The challenge here is bringing together:

- pedagogy that treats learning as a flexible process and a journey of development, where each child progresses according to different rhythms to be respected;
- SLA theories that tell us how learners construct interlanguage systems which do not develop linearly but which oscillate between stages characterized by alternatively correct and incorrect forms. This means that it is rather hard to make a clear-cut distinction between “knowing or not knowing” a specific language point (Ellis, 1997);
- Accountability so that stakeholders can see the tangible gains made by YLs.

Because of this challenge, I like Crombie’s (1985: 9) term “familiarize”: to me it implies the idea of learners being exposed to the target language and experiencing it in a variety of ways and situations which then leads them to progressively develop comprehension and then active use. “Familiarise” indicates the acceptance of interlanguage as a necessary phase in the process and of the notion that learners may need a long time before they are able to use a language item competently. Familiarise also suggests that there are no fixed, pre-determined objectives to achieve in a fixed period of time. Familiarise, then, is very different from Mager’s concept (1962) of precisely measurable objectives.

However, the value of stating goals should not be overlooked. Stating goals is a way of bringing into focus what you wish to achieve in a course and what your priorities are for it. Graves (2000:75-76) uses the analogy of a journey where “the destination is the goal; the journey is the course”. She also makes a distinction between goals and objectives and I think it’s one that’s worth keeping:

*The objectives are the different points you pass through on the journey to the destination... objectives are statements about how the goals will be achieved. Through objectives, a goal is broken down into learnable and teachable units (ibid.).*

I also like the term “progress indicators” (The North Dakota Standards and Benchmarks for foreign language) to refer to the stages towards the achievement of goals as it suggests the idea of a continuum. Besides, “progress indicators” is a term more consistent with the idea of interlanguage and the ups and downs which are the common experience of all language learners and it seems to be more pedagogically justifiable in the case of young learners. It also fits in with the idea of assessing what each individual learner can do with reference to broad goals rather than with
reference to a too-detailed list of limited objectives. This approach can clearly be seen also in the NIBIS Kern curriculum (2006) where there is an explicit statement justifying the choice of not including any list if items, as each child develops at his/her own pace and learning is not linear.

Goals are ways of responding to needs and in the case of young learners it should not be just language needs. A more suitable question to ask would be what general language or other pedagogical needs do learners have that this course can address? (Hurst 2000:1 adapted). Aims and objectives should also refer to cognitive, educational and affective aspects. The 1996 U.S. national guidelines for FL in schools from kindergarten to secondary include goals in five areas of which just one is strictly linguistic:

1. Communication, covering the properly linguistic content;
2. Culture, that is knowledge and understanding of other cultures;
3. Connections that is connecting with other disciplines,
4. Comparisons, which is comparing L1 and L2;
5. Communities, which is participating in multilingual Communities at home and abroad (Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century, 1996).

In Latvia some schools are piloting a curriculum combining language objectives with objectives of logical thinking. Typical extra-linguistic goals to be achieved through the study of languages are: learning to learn; social skills, such as the ability to co-operate with peers, and self confidence.

Task 8

With a specific course of YLs in mind,

- state the three goals that are a priority for you
- identify two progress indicators for each of the goals.

If the course has an official statement of aims and objectives, compare them with yours.

Explicit statements of what learning will be achieved in a particular syllabus, course or even lesson can be called aims, objectives or learning outcomes. They can be expressed according to various perspectives. They can be, for example,

- what the teacher is hoping to achieve in the classroom (Example: I will expose learners to classical nursery rhymes)
- what learners are expected to achieve in the classroom (Example: by the end of the lesson, learners will have understood oral instructions in English and acted accordingly)
• the tasks learners should be able to do in the real world (Example: learners will be able to understand labels of products written in English)

It has been argued that aims/learning outcomes/objectives should be SMART, that is, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (Petty, 2004). While such acronyms can be criticised for pandering to an increasingly popular view of education as a commodity rather than a philosophy (Cochran-Smith, 2001), the SMART acronym can help syllabus, course and lesson designers to make explicit the purpose of the learning.

The following task consists of an analysis of expected learning outcomes articulated in various ways.

### Task 9

Analyse the following and say if they are
- SMART
- suitable or unsuitable for YLs; more suitable to an ESOL or an EFL context
- are realistically achievable for YLs, and, if they are, at what age and after about how much tuition
- language focussed or oriented to other learning dimensions

If possible, compare your ideas with a colleague

#### Learners

- retell simple stories orally
- compare holidays and celebrations in different countries
- show understanding of simple oral instructions through appropriate physical response
- speak about themselves
- discuss the climate of their country using appropriate terminology
- role play dialogues from the text-book
- acquire basic competencies in the use of English
- identify the main ideas from written texts aimed at the appropriate age from the target culture
- write postcards
- recognize English words in their native language
- interact in classroom life using appropriate forms of politeness
- identify commonly held positive and negative generalizations about the target culture
- improve their speaking skill
- know and imitate cultural activities appropriate for their age (e.g. games, songs, dances)
• can describe a pet orally and in writing
• can answer questions requiring the use of numbers up to 100
• can speak and write about past events and future plans.

How did you find the above task? As often happens with our tasks, there is no clear-cut answer to the above questions, but probably most of you would agree in considering “improve their speaking skill” vague and “interact in classroom life using appropriate forms of politeness” rather general and were tempted to immediately ask which forms of politeness were to be acquired and used. You may also wonder whether and how it is possible to ‘measure’ if YLs have achieved any of the above: this will be the subject of the last unit. The task may also have made you aware, or more aware, of the difficulties in expressing expected learning outcomes avoiding both atomizing objectives and vagueness.

Before moving on, I would like to draw your attention to the language content of courses for the nine/twelve year olds. One of the risks of EFL is that of ignoring the learning potential of the group and entertaining them with the repetition of colours, numbers, animals and so on. Such an approach, while easy to achieve in the classroom, often generates boredom and, in some cases complaints from parents. However, knowing how to move on from such areas can be difficult for novice teachers in particular, who may worry about keeping YLs entertained and engaged.

Task 10

Which of the following would you consider realistically learnable by the 9/12 age group? How would you introduce them into the class?

• I’d like
• Asking for and giving personal information
• Simple shopping transactions
• Simple past
• Writing a greetings card
• Listening and retelling a story
• To be going to
• Let’s…
• Repeating a set of tongue-twisters.

All of these are of course suitable and possible, depending on the learners and the context. The point is that YLs do not have to exist on a diet of vocabulary and games: they have great learning potential and it is the careful exploitation of this that will lead to satisfied learners, parents – and, hopefully, teachers.
The last part of this section is dedicated to a task based on a document called “The English language proficiency benchmarks for non-English-speaking pupils at primary level”. This document was developed by IILT (Integrate Ireland Language and Training) to respond to the linguistic needs of non-English speaking children attending primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It tries to identify the aspects of English language competence necessary to this particular group of learners and describes them adapting the levels of the CEFR to this target group.

**Task 11**

Read the document in Appendix D

- Compare the context in the document with yours and identify similarities and differences.
- Look at the *Global benchmarks of communicative proficiency* and the *Global scales of underlying linguistic competence*. Would they be suitable for your context and your way of describing learning outcomes or would you need to adapt them? If so, how? (If you teach EFL you may like to consider only the A1 Breakthrough column).
- With reference to the Units of work at the beginning of Part II, which of the topics would you consider relevant for your context? Choose one and, if necessary, adapt the objectives for a course you are familiar with.
- In your view, which are the strong and the weak points of the document?

First a general comment: the document reflects an ESOL context and some of the items may not apply to an EFL context. Moreover, the B1 column might be too advanced in certain EFL contexts. As for the last question, I personally appreciate the clarity and pedagogical effort of the document but I’m always rather critical of looking at progress as advancing from well defined lower stages to more advanced ones as I think that in real life the borders are blurred and children, especially in an ESOL context, start learning a lot of the following stage, before completely mastering the expected competence of the stage at which they are supposed to be.

### 9.3.4 Conceptualizing content

In this section we look at different ways in which the content of the course can be organised. We touched on this briefly in section 9.2.1, when we discussed approaches to syllabus design but here we go into more detail.

The organisation of course content is “work in progress” for the class teacher as the children’s response may lead to modifications of the original plan. In the case of an externally designed syllabus there should be attention to what is considered essential, but at the same time, realistically achievable. There also needs to be space for
flexibility so that teachers can make the necessary adaptations. Task 12 is an opportunity for you to get to grips with the choices involved.

**Task 12**

Consider one of the situations below with reference to the grid in Appendix E. Would you consider all the categories mentioned? What would you suggest for each of the categories considered? Would you add other categories? Would you label the ones given in a different way?

- A private one year course with one fifty minute lesson per week for up to ten children aged 4 and 5.
- A two week summer course for fifteen 11-13 year olds in the U.K. Learners come from different countries and have different previous EFL experiences and levels, although they are broadly pre-intermediate.
- A course (two lessons per week) for 8 year old beginners studying English for three years at primary school in classes of twenty-five.

This task may have elicited reflections on priorities, the way the various categories are interrelated and the need to identify which category is the main one. Probably you have not been able to include everything you wanted and in this case you need a strategy to identify priorities and act accordingly. The question to ask here is: *What do I see as most important for learners to acquire with reference to their situation?*

The fact that the various categories are interrelated leads us to the need to identify an organising principle to use as a basic framework and then see how the others can be connected to it. In other words, it’s a way of finding a focus rather than cutting things out. The NIBIS Kerncurriculum (2006), for instance, highlights how competencies should not be understood as isolated processes but each as a part of a complex element of the general competencies.

In Task 2 you analysed various types of syllabus from the point of view of the underlying approach. Task 12 has given you the opportunity to explore a variety of possibilities for expressing the potential content of a syllabus. A syllabus is defined according to the category chosen as the main organising principle around which everything else is built. So, a syllabus focused on the language system is defined as a structural syllabus. A syllabus based on topics is called a topic-based syllabus. A syllabus based on tasks is a task-based syllabus. And we can have an activity-based syllabus, a functional syllabus, a notional syllabus and a syllabus which is a collection of texts (Willis, 2003). A story-based syllabus would be a possible option to implement Willis’s suggestion with reference to YLs and would be in line with the methodology advocated by Jarvis (2000), when she gives examples of how particular language points can be illustrated through various tellings of a story.
For many teachers, the course book becomes the syllabus as no formal syllabus document exists in the institution in which they are working. Most syllabi of published course books are ‘multi strand’ as they include a syllabus for each of the aspects of language and learning covered. General course books aim to cover a range of language systems and skills, but some course books claim to follow a particular syllabus type be it lexis, task, functions or another underlying principle. Subsequently, some syllabi detail the language content to be taught, while in others the language content derives from the topic or the text.

Pinter (2006) highlights the concept of “a multilayered syllabus” for YLs; this includes other components such as topics or themes, culture or learning to learn besides “the traditional structural and functional language components”. As with syllabi for adult learners, one of the components tends to be “primary” and becomes the “main organizational principle” (ibid: 115 – 116). You might like to look at your own coursebook at this stage and see what different strands it contains. Typical labels for these strands are: grammar, functions, vocabulary, activities, tasks, culture, topics, skills, projects, cross-curricular links. etc. There are other syllabus types that have not been mentioned here such as, for instance the competency-based; the reason is that they are not usually considered relevant to teaching young learners.

9.3.5 Putting it all together

So far we have discussed various aspects of course and syllabus design and treated them somewhat in isolation. The point is, of course, that in organising an actual course, we have to bring everything together in order to implement it practically. This will involve reconciling potentially conflicting demands, for example the learners’ characteristics and needs, the desirable learning outcomes, the shared view of language and language learning and teaching and the potentialities and the constraints of the situation, to name but a few factors.

As you know from the discussion in the previous points, potentially a complete course description could contain:

- a description of the rationale on which it is based
- a specification of general goals
- a specification of objectives (linguistic, communicative, cognitive, affective, social etc.)
- a specification of the content reflecting the approach adopted
• a specification of the order in which the content should be taught (this may or may not involve the specification of teaching units such as modules or lessons)
• the teaching material or suggestions about the features of the desirable materials, possibly with some examples
• indications or suggestions about the desirable activities and tasks, possibly with some examples
• indications or suggestions about the desirable media to be used
• indications or suggestions about assessment and evaluation.

Not all course descriptions include or should include all the above and not with the same level of detail. The English National curriculum for foreign languages has a section called “communicating in the target language” that suggests methodological indications rather than objectives; examples are “to use the language for real purposes, as well as to practise skills” and “to use everyday classrooms events as a context for spontaneous speech” (Sharpe, 2001: 53).

It is now time to look at some actual course documents in some detail. You may prefer to use your own as an example, or look at the content map of a book you are familiar with, or you can use some of the ones I suggest, or any others that you are interested in looking at.

The ones I suggest are:

• Summer Course - Teens 1 (Junior 1/2); (see Appendix F)
• GenkiEnglish.com Curriculum/Lesson Plans (see Appendix G)
• English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide. 2002. Curriculum Development Council. HKSAR (See Appendix H)
• Trinity Spoken English Exams Syllabus Any Grade from one to six (See Appendix I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyse three of the documents (either those suggested above or your own choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is the ‘main organisational principle’ for each document?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which of the items on the list above are provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which document would you would prefer to work with? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For each document, identify one feature that you consider particularly positive and would like to find in the official syllabus of your own course or would like to take into account when writing a syllabus for your class or for a wider target group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written by Paula de Nagy with Jane Willis
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
All the course documents listed have been designed for different target audiences and different purposes and this explains the differences in structure and content. Being more comfortable with one or the other depends a lot on each teacher’s individual needs and perspective. Some of us appreciate a suggestion of general principles to be interpreted and implemented giving the teacher the responsibility of the *what* and the *how*, while others are happier with less “theory” and more practical support. For some a detailed syllabus might be a straitjacket while a novice teacher might enjoy more precise guidelines.

And this is the right moment for another article included in the core readings: Bayyurt and Alptekin (2000). It deals with the organization of a course in Turkey.

### 9.4 Further Considerations

While in many adult courses, learners are given a copy of the course document, this usually does not happen with YLs. Nevertheless, as end users, YLs are directly affected by the content of course documentation. They are even more affected by the way the teacher interprets and implements such documentation. Resourceful teachers can make a good deal even out of constraining or poor syllabi.

With reference to the EFL /ESOL syllabus for young learners, it is difficult to decide whether it is the syllabus that orients the approach or the opposite, but for sure a relationship between the two exists and, in some cases, it is quite clear and explicit while in others it is subtle and perceptible only when carefully searched out. If children learn more easily when language is made real and meaningful for them, then our orientation should be towards a syllabus and an approach that facilitates comprehension, discovery, involvement of various dimensions, meaningful language use focussing on relevant content, task completion and interaction. “Language teaching should relate to the child’s world… children live in world of fantasy and make-believe… in their world there are no tenses, nouns, or adjectives… no schemas labelled *grammar, lexis, phonology, discourse*... it follows that when we plan a syllabus for young learners we should make sure it is experientially appropriate”. (Bourke, 2006: 280).

Language education has sometimes been presented as an orderly type of cognitive, left-brain activity but “significant learning combines the logical *and* the intuitive, the intellect *and* the feelings, the concept and the experience… when we learn that way, we are *whole*, utilizing all our masculine and feminine capacities” (Rogers, 1983: 20). Ignoring the somewhat stereotypical gendered comment here, it seems quite clear that a consideration of the learner as a whole person should be an important feature of syllabus design. What is more, an interesting alternative to any form of traditional, itemized syllabus could be that of starting from language learning principles, defining
broad goals, suggesting relevant topics and giving teachers the freedom and responsibility to take decisions about what language is to be taught and how it is to be done. For confident and experienced teachers, the description of the language content could even be the point of arrival of the work with each particular class instead of the point of departure. This does not mean improvising but rather planning to suit the interests and levels of each class and would fit a story-based syllabus perfectly. While it might be difficult for teachers to align this kind of work with national standards and tests, if these are not a consideration, such an approach should foster the children’s learning potential and create a meaningful learning environment.

9.5 Looking ahead

This Unit has uncovered the characteristics of various syllabus types and hopefully has made you aware of features of their design, their potentialities and constraints.

At this point, ask yourself

- How has this unit modified your approach to the official syllabus?
- What are the insights you have gained for the design of the courses you are teaching?
- What are the areas that need further clarification and exploration?

If you have not yet made up your mind about a topic for your assignment how would you like designing a syllabus based on stories? Or designing a course for one of your classes adapting the official syllabus? Or researching the impact of a syllabus on the learners’ oral or written skills?

References

- **Bourke, J.M.** 2006. “Designing a topic-based syllabus for young learners” in *ELT Journal.* Vol. 60/3

• **Dubin, F. and Olshtain, E** 1986. *Course Design: developing programs and materials for language learning.* O .U. P.


• Kerncurriculum für die Grundschule Schuljahrgange 3-4. Englisch. 2006 NIBIS [http://db2.nibis.de/1db/cuvo/ausgabe/] last accessed March 2008

• **Long, H. and Crookes, G.** (1992). “Approaches to task-Based Syllabus Design”. In *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 26 No. 1


• **McKay, P.** 2006. *Assessing Young Language Learners.* C.U. P.

• National Standards for foreign Language Education. 1996. ACTFL

• North Dakota Standards and Benchmarks Foreign Language. Available at [http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/content/foreign.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/content/foreign.pdf) last accessed March 2008.


• **Pinter, A.** 2006. *Teaching Young Language Learners.* O.U.P.

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*Written by Paula de Nagy with Jane Willis
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008*
Appendix A

What is a syllabus?

A syllabus is a specification of the content and the ordering of what is to be taught (Finney, 2002:70)

A syllabus is the vehicle through which policy-makers convey information to teachers, textbook writers, examination committees and learners concerning the program. This document ideally describes:
1. What the learners are expected to know at the end of the course, or the course objectives in operational terms
2. What is to be taught or learned during the course, in the form of an inventory of items
3. What it is to be taught, and at what rate of progress, with reference to levels and time constraints
4. How it is to be taught, suggesting procedures and materials
5. How it is to be evaluated.
(Abridged and adapted from Dubin and Olshtain, 1986: 27 – 28).

A syllabus, as generally conceived, is a list or inventory of items or units with which learners are to be familiarized (Crombie, 1985: 9).
The content syllabus is based on experiential content derived from “some fairly-well defined subject area” (Nunan, 1988: 48).

The function of a syllabus is not to provide a prospectus of everything that the learner has to do. It is, so to speak, a set of bearings for teacher action and not a set of instructions for learner activity. (Widdowson, 1990:129).

Traditionally people think of a language syllabus as an inventory of grammatical, lexical and functional items which represent learning aims… Another way of thinking of the language syllabus is to base it on the pedagogic corpus. Instead of identifying an inventory of language items we see syllabus construction as the assembly of a corpus of texts which learners will process for meaning…Once a text has been processed for meaning it is available for language study. (Willis, D. 2003: 222-223).

Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finney, 2002:70</td>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher is not free to decide about the linguistic content and sequence but as there is no indication about methodology and topics s/he is responsible for the way the syllabus is taught. In this case the teacher has also to define objectives: what should learners know and be able to do with the items listed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubin and Olshtain, 1986:27-28</td>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher is less free than above as also procedures and materials are given. Some would look at this as support and others as constraint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crombie, 1985: 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>There is no indication about sequence; the reference to discourse units versus isolated items may be understood as an implicit methodological orientation towards learning the target language as discourse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunan, 1988: 48</td>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher has to adapt the language deriving from content to the learners’ level and learning pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widdowson, 1990:129</td>
<td></td>
<td>This syllabus is neither too detailed nor prescriptive. It could be used by the teacher as a general starting point to design a course and also as a way to check if the course being taught needs adjustments in order to include what the syllabus suggests as essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis D., 2003: 222-223</td>
<td></td>
<td>This is completely different from the others and the teacher’s first task is to choose suitable texts to work on from a corpus. A reference inventory of items could be constructed as the result of what has been focussed working on the texts. One of the challenges facing the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written by Paula de Nagy with Jane Willis
Revised by Rita Balbi
May 2008
teacher here is that of covering what learners need and according to a manageable sequence.

Appendix C

From the CMD Module: page 7
See your module blackboard

Appendix D

English language proficiency benchmarks for non-English-speaking pupils at primary level, IILT

See your module blackboard

Appendix E

What would you like course participants to learn?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Language</strong> (grammar, lexis, pronunciation)</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong> (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Notions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content (topics, themes, subjects)</th>
<th></th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes (toward language, language learning and culture)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning strategies</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture (cultural awareness, Knowledge of aspect of culture)</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Socio- cultural aspects (interaction, using appropriate language)</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres (Stories, songs, rhymes, Etc.)</th>
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Revised by Rita Balbi
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Appendix F
Summer course

Teens 1 (Junior 1/2)

IT’S SUMMER PACK - to be covered over 30 hours

N.B. Some of the material is quite high level, but is usable if adapted. Some of it is unsuitable for this age (“How to order a pint of beer”).

AIM: for sts to make a wall display of their perfect holiday resort.

This could include: a map of the island / resort and a description of what is there; pictures and descriptions of the people they would take with them etc it would incorporate: present simple for describing places, there is / are, prepositions of location. See below for a full list.

The pack is very task and activity based, so there is no grammar taught explicitly. It therefore may require some supplementary grammar input to help students to do the activities / tasks.

The pack dos not need to be followed in order. Try to get through all of the structures here, (more or less the syllabus for Inf 2 / J1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>structure</th>
<th>activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present tenses, to be, have got</td>
<td>favourite t-shirts; dictation, describe and draw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb to be (all forms and persons)</td>
<td>opinions 11. In our resort, most people.... Every day on holiday, we...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present simple</td>
<td>describing hotel rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there is / there are .</td>
<td>hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present simple questions</td>
<td>survey about the beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can / can’t for ability</td>
<td>writing holiday postcards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present simple vs continuous</td>
<td>describing where things are on the beach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepositions of location</td>
<td>picture story; word / picture story (and sts write their own); souvenir - describing holiday souvenirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past simple</td>
<td>on the beach questionnaire - it will need rewriting, possibly using pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>going to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Their holiday plans – picture / word text. A tour of major European capital cities: in Paris we’re going to see

interrupted past continuous (if time) ??

Books which can be used for supplementary ideas:
World Class 2 - we have the tapes  Network 1 - we have the tapes
Project English 1 - we have the tapes  Reward packs
Teamwork 1 - we don’t have the tapes  (Magic Time 1 - if stuck)
DO NOT USE CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH FOR SCHOOLS

Appendix G

GenkiEnglish.com Curriculum/Lesson Plans

See your Module Blackboard

Appendix H

English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide

See your module blackboard

Appendix I

The Trinity Spoken English Exams Syllabus for any Grade from one to six

See your module blackboard
TYL 10

Assessment and Evaluation

CONTENTS

Goals
Reading

10.1 Introduction

10.2 General Issues

10.3 Assessment by the teacher (internal assessment)
   10.3.1 Long established assessment modalities
   10.3.2 Other assessment modalities
   10.3.3 Recording and reporting results

10.4 External assessment
   10.4.1 Preliminary considerations
   10.4.2 Exams for young learners
   10.4.3 Other exams accessible to young learners

10.5 Looking ahead

References

Appendices

Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Appendix E
Appendix F
Appendix G
Appendix H

Written by Rita Balbi
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Goals

This unit is about assessing and evaluating children’s language learning. After a brief introduction to key concepts about these issues, it deals with the relationship between teaching YLs and assessment and presents an overview and a discussion of various approaches to obtaining feedback on YLs’ proficiency in ESOL and EFL.

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the complex issues involved in assessing and evaluating YLs' proficiency in the target language
- understand the underlying principles of different approaches to the assessment of young learners
- identify criteria for evaluating different assessment procedures
- analyse and evaluate the assessment procedures used in your context
- develop your own approach to the assessment of young learners.

Reading

Core Reading


Recommended Reading

- Little, D. 2007 “Language learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio: two ESL case studies,” paper given at IATEFL learner Autonomy SIG, CELTE, Warwick University Available at

- **Shaaban, K.** 2001. “Assessment of young learners”. In *Forum* 39/4

### 10.1 Introduction

The present world trend towards a progressive lowering of the starting age for learning English has been accompanied by a major increase in studies and research on methodology issues with reference to YLs. Initially most of the work in this field has concentrated on the identification of the best classroom practice to foster motivation and learning: assessment, in particular in the case of EFL, has not attracted the same attention for a number of reasons, and is a more recent development. This may have been a matter of priorities as *how* to teach was the first concern with *what* added to *how* in more sophisticated contexts. Another reason may have been the idea that testing YLs in a formal way was perceived as conflicting with the “playful” approach usually advocated. What is more, primary teachers had hardly any familiarity with the assessment techniques generally associated with EFL and would have to learn them. (The situation was somewhat different for English as a second language and, sometimes, for English as a foreign language in private language schools where testing was part of the tradition.) It is only from the late nineties that we have witnessed an increasing interest in the reasons for and means of assessing YLs’ L2 competence as a specific research and discussion area. Task 1 asks you to reflect on this issue.

**Task 1**

Answer the following

- Do you think YLs’ L2 competence should be assessed? Give reasons to support your view.

If your answer to the previous question is positive, which of the following reasons...
most aptly summarises your position?

- YLs are assessed in other subjects, and L2 should not be different
- Assessment motivates learners to work hard
- Assessment is useful to plan future teaching
- Parents require assessment
- Learners need to know how they are progressing

If the answer is no, how would you justify your position to parents, school management and other interested stakeholders?

Read Appendix A and identify

- the reasons for assessment that you consider most valid among those mentioned there
- any of the purposes of assessment described that reflects the practice operating in a YL context you are familiar with
- a situation in which you experienced the tensions described by McKay.

With reference to the above task, I would like to point out that the reasons quoted are not necessarily mutually exclusive as a single assessment procedure can potentially provide information relevant to various functions and stakeholders (Rea-Dickins, 2000); nevertheless, the main reason why an assessment procedure is implemented should determine its focus, methodology and the nature of the means involved. An obvious example is the difference between assessment conducted by teachers in class for pedagogical purposes and big projects set up by institutions or governments to check the accountability of schools or programmes.

At this point you are advised to read Rea-Dickens and Rixon, 1999, which is part of your core reading.

A second question to answer is whether there is something else to assess besides language proficiency; obviously learning strategies and even attitudes are also potentially assessable and I would argue that both areas are of special interest with YLs as both have a strong impact on future, on-going learning. The reasons are that the former deals with learning to learn and the latter with sustaining motivation. After these preliminary observations we now move to deal with some general issues and how they refer to the YLs’ context.

**10.2 General Issues**

Agreeing on terminology is essential to start the discussion on the topic of this unit as there is no general consensus about the meaning of some commonly used terms, which are often referred to in different ways by different authors. Let’s start from testing; this is the most frequent word meaning examining and is generally
understood as the action to find out what learners know (or don’t know!); it is however, also used as a synonym of checking learners’ achievement or proficiency through “objective, standardized texts” (Hancock, 1994).

As for assessment, Hancock’s view is that it is “an on going strategy through which student learning is not only monitored – a trait shared with testing – but by which students are involved in making decisions about the degree to which their performance matches their ability.” More generally, however, it refers to the appraisal of the learning of individuals in contrast with ‘evaluation’ that is the term used for programmes and curricula (Edelenbos, 1997). Within this framework, testing may be included but it is not just testing. The same approach is taken by Rixon (undated) that observes that “it is clearer and more convenient in English to keep the terms assessment and evaluation distinct, although in other languages their equivalents are sometimes used interchangeably” (Ibid: 1). The appraisal of curricula is beyond the direct scope of this unit that is centred on the process and procedures for obtaining information about young learners’ abilities and attainments; if, by chance, you are particularly interested in this area, you could read Edelenbos and Vinyè (2000).

It is, however, worth observing that, in some contexts, evaluation is used as a wider term entailing assessment and acting on its results. According to this view, evaluation is not simply a means for obtaining information but it is also a decision making process. (Example: deciding if an EFL learner can pass to a more advanced course or an ESOL learner to mainstream instruction).

The following task focuses on the features of various assessment types.

**Task 2**

**Part 1**

The term assessment is often accompanied by an adjective or a noun with the function of an adjective to indicate a specific assessment type. For example: achievement assessment. Make a list of those that come to your mind and compare it with that in Appendix B.

**Part 2**

How would you define the assessment types in Appendix B? The list may seem quite long, (however it is not exhaustive!) so you could choose to consider the items that seem more interesting to you. Compare your definitions with those in Appendix C.

Which of the items in Appendix C would you consider suitable for young learners?
I hope that Task 2 has given you an idea of the multiplicity of aspects involved in assessment and of the complexity of the relationship between assessment purposes and assessment procedures. Many of the assessment modalities described could be paired as they deal with the same aspect from different perspectives, as, for example “analytic/holistic” and “achievement/proficiency” but this does not mean that one term has a positive connotation and the other a negative one. Besides one procedure may share more than one of the features implied in the definitions in Appendix B. Example: An interview to assign a learner to a specific course can be described as placement assessment based on proficiency.

The terms described are taken from those used to talk about assessment in general and are not specific to young learners, although most of them correspond to procedures potentially adoptable also with them. With this, however, I do not mean to suggest that they are all equally appropriate for this age group or that they do not need specific interpretation and adaptation especially with the very young ones. As an example, consider norm-referencing assessment; for sure you know that it is a fairly common system in some cultures; however, there are serious pedagogical objections to its use. In some states in the U.S. it is forbidden to assess ESOL learners in primary and secondary school in this way in the first three years of residence in the U.S. (Gomez, 2000).

The last part of this section considers the elements that contribute to make assessment as fair as possible. You are probably already familiar with two principles traditionally associated with the quality of standard tests and, more explicitly, with validity and reliability. The former refers to the extent to which a procedure assesses what it is meant to assess while the latter is concerned with the degree of consistency of the results of the same procedure on different occasions. Under the influence of communicative and humanistic approaches, both concepts are being shaped in a wider perspective that seems to be more appropriate to the YLs’ context.

Accordingly, validity in the traditional sense is termed as “trustworthiness” and an assessment procedure is considered credible in as much as it enables learners to show all that they can do with reference to the construct considered (Huerta Macias, 2002). As for reliability, there are objections to the traditional concept where it “is often equated with stability” (Williams and Burden, 1997: 90), as performance may vary because of the dynamic nature of learning. Consequently, reliability is preferably seen as consistency of results through the collection of data from different tasks or different sources also implying a process of triangulation similar to that commonly used in qualitative research (Huerta Macias, 2002). An example of triangulation is described in Rea-Dickins and Gardner, 2000, where children in an EAL programme were observed and assessed by the class teacher, the language support coordinator and the bilingual education assistant.
The possible conflict between validity and reliability is pointed out by Cameron (2001) who acknowledges that the most reliable assessments are those in which each item measures only a single aspect of a skill but also shows how the most valid are those that collect information on several aspects of the same skill.

The aim of the following task is to explore other aspects contributing to the fairness of assessment.

**Task 3**

Besides validity and reliability as described above, what else would you consider a factor of fair assessment in the context of Young Learners?

Rank the following according to the importance that you attribute to each of them.

Assessment should

- be anxiety free
- be congruent with the methodological approach adopted
- be congruent with what has been taught
- be quick and easy to administer
- be quick and easy to score
- consider the learners’ cognitive development
- consider the learners’ culture
- consider the learners’ linguistic needs
- give evidence of what each learner can do without the support usually provided during lessons
- reflect the syllabus objectives.

What are your comments about the previous task? Probably you have noticed that some of the items refer to the creation of a learner friendly context while others to the practical aspects faced by the teacher. In my opinion, it would be difficult to decide about priorities among the former as they are all equally important. The relevance of congruence with content and methodology is highlighted by McKay (2006) and the consideration of the learners’ cognitive development and culture by Cameron (2001). Pinter points out that appraisal should be based on the goals of the syllabus and conducted with activities “compatible” with those used everyday in the classroom (Pinter, 2006:133). The idea of assessment as a lonely activity devoid of any support has a long tradition; however, it is now challenged for pedagogical reasons (McKay, 2006).

The traditional qualities of fair assessment are included and further developed in the concept of “usefulness” (Bachman and Palmer, 1996) embraced by McKay: “usefulness includes important ideas that help us to ensure that assessment procedures..."
will give assessors the best evidence for assessment decisions about children’s language use ability” (McKay 2006:113). The “important ideas” are expressed through a series of questions to see to what extent assessment is reliable, valid, authentic, interactive and practical and has a positive impact on all stakeholders. In this view, reliability keeps its traditional meaning of consistency of results; validity refers to construct validity that is “the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the inferences about students’ ability and the decisions teachers and assessors make about them on the basis of the assessment procedures used”. Authenticity refers to the use of language “relevant and natural to the child’s world”. (Ibid: 113). Interactivity requires that learners are engaged “in using the language knowledge and skills that are being assessed”; practicality refers to the feasibility in the situation considered. (Ibid: 14 – 15). The following task has the aim to analyse an assessment experience to understand its principles and features and see how it responds to some of the criteria described above.

**Task 4**

Read Hasselgren 2000 and identify the reasons why the experience described can be considered innovative.

How does it respond to the following assessment criteria? List examples

- Authenticity
- Congruence with the methodological approach adopted
- Congruence with what has been taught
- Practicality
- Provision of evidence of what each learner can do (without support? With support? If there is support, what kind of support?)

How would the Norwegian experience suit your context?

Do you know of any other assessment experiences that you would consider particularly suitable for young learners? If you do, share them with the discussion list.

Our focus so far has been the introduction of the issue of assessment addressing two different aspects: one has been the reasons for assessing young learners and the other the general principles and terms associated with assessment. The following sections are concerned with internal and external assessment through the analysis of procedures and with reference to various aspects of language competence. In doing so, we will also identify the advantages and the disadvantages of various assessment modalities.
10.3 Assessment by the teacher (internal assessment)

In previous units we have looked at various aspects of language learning with the aim of identifying appropriate ways to foster the development of YLs’ competence and motivation. In this unit we will try to deal with assessment from a similar perspective. In doing so, we will examine and discuss the problems and potentialities connected with this aspect of teaching. In fact, a preliminary consideration is that assessment, especially in the case of YLs, should be integrated in the teaching/learning process, avoiding the rather widespread habit of considering it as completely detached from the rest. This is a possible risk even when the assessor is the course or class teacher.

10.3.1 Long established assessment modalities

My first idea for the title of this section was “traditional assessment modalities” but then I thought of changing “traditional” into “long established” as the former term is sometimes perceived with a negative connotation while I did not want a title that might sound sort of evaluative. And then there are no clear-cut categories in this area; for example, some authors include observation among the traditional modalities and others among the alternative ones. The former view is based on the assumption that observation has traditionally been part of the teacher’s job and the latter on the fact that it shares all the features of alternative assessment. These initial remarks lead us to a task which aims at raising the awareness of your assessment practice and the theory underlying it and at identifying ways of making the match between the approach to teaching and to assessing.

Task 5

Part 1

If you are teaching YLs at present, think of the assessment modalities that you have used recently and then answer the following questions:

How do you keep records of your learners’ performance? How do you analyse the data collected?

With reference to YLs, what are the advantages and the drawbacks of the assessment procedures listed below?

How would you consider them in relation to content/task based syllabi and approaches?

- Letter-writing
- Matching activities
• Observation of the learners’ performance in class, taking notes of whatever seems meaningful
• Planned observation of the learners’ performance with reference to specific tasks and to specific components of language proficiency
• Oral interviews
• Pairs acting a memorized dialogue
• Tests provided in the text-book
• Tests designed by the teacher
• Tests available form other sources

Part 2

Read the following piece from Shaaban, 2001. Do you agree with the conclusive statement?

Brown and Hudson (1998) identified these three types of response required in most classroom assessment: selected-response (true-false, matching, multiple choice), constructed response (fill-in, short answer, performance), and personal-response (conferences, portfolios, self and peer assessment). At the primary level, assessment should begin with the use of personal response. As students’ proficiency levels increase, teachers can move gradually into constructed response assessment and later into selected-response assessment.

Part 3

Read the following piece from Williams and Burden (1997:41-42). How can the above procedures contribute to learning in the way described?

Another notable aspect of Fuerstein’s work is his introduction of the concept of dynamic assessment, which is a way of assessing the true potential of children that differs significantly from conventional tests. Here the essentially interactive nature of learning is extended to the process of assessment. Rather than viewing assessment as a process carried out by one person, such a teacher, on another, a learner, it is seen as a two-way process involving interaction between both parties. The role of the assessor therefore becomes one of entering into a dialogue with the person being assessed to find out their current level of performance on any task and sharing with them possible ways in which their performance might be improved on a subsequent occasion. Thus, assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate processes.

Probably you use more than one procedure when assessing and this is valuable because it contributes to a more reliable picture of each child in the class. Different procedures provide different information and none alone can tell us all that we need
to know about a child’s learning. Tests focus on specific language items and therefore they are rather limited in their scope. Those designed by the teacher or available in the text-book have a high probability of reflecting what has been taught and therefore they often provide “good” results which give learners a sense of achievement boosting motivation. They do not take much class time, are easy to score and generally they do not originate discussions about the role of the assessor, the task type or other facets of more progressive testing. They are therefore perceived as fair.

An objection to the widespread use of teacher designed tests is that they may not conform to the criteria of validity and reliability traditionally desirable in tests. Tests from other sources pose different problems; learners may be confused by the way instructions are worded and even by the format of the test, which may be unfamiliar to them. Another aspect that should not be underestimated is that these tests may require reading and writing while children may be accustomed to mainly oral work. In other words, children’s performance may be negatively influenced by their lack of strategies in coping with standardized tests.

With reference to content/task based learning and teaching, you may notice that traditional tests are not able to assess the variety of language that children are able to produce. In addition, they reflect an assumption about the nature of language which is opposite to that of content/task based approaches characterised by a holistic perspective and a focus on discourse rather than on individual items (See Units 4 and 9 in particular).

Answering correctly in a test does not mean that learners can use the same language patterns in conversation. In fact, the opposite may be true; some learners able to use them in discourse may be at a loss when taking a test with isolated sentences devoid of any context. When content and language work together, “teachers check whether the discourse as a whole (and its elements) work appropriately to convey the intended meaning required by the content” (McKay, 2006:76). When assessing in this way, teachers do not look for “correctness of form to see whether language rules are violated or not” (Ibid: 76) but rather at the overall communicative performance. As for the contribution to learning, with pen and paper tests there is no way of linking the correct answer to a context that might help in remembering it.

With reference to the list of activities you analysed in Task 5, letter writing is a popular form of assessment especially with the 9/12 age group. It has the advantage that it is a real life activity. It may be a problem when this genre is unfamiliar to learners even in L1. However, the tendency to use various types of written assessment, even when most of the class work is oral, may be due to the fact that assessing oral language is more difficult; in fact written language is fixed while with oral language, unless recorded, the appraisal is immediate and there is no possibility of going back to it for further consideration.
What about oral interviews? In content/task based teaching, the interview should be a collaborative interaction between teacher and learner. This means that the teacher’s role is not just that of an inquirer asking questions in order to scrutinize the answers for assessment purposes! S/he should acknowledge the children’s contributions with content focused comments and ask questions to encourage learners to go deeper into the topic dealt with and articulate feelings, examples and personal experiences. In this context, any performance based on memorized dialogues or memorized answers to a set of questions should be banned. Learners should be evaluated “on what they integrate and produce, rather on what they are able to recall and reproduce” (Huerta-Macias, 1995: 9). Oral interviews have the advantage of giving learners opportunities to interact with a competent adult; the disadvantage is that, unless involved in doing something that keeps them busy, the other children do tend to switch off. One of the teachers in the project described in Rea-Dickins 2000, observed that “if you’re a single teacher in a class, very often you get mobbed after five minutes. You can’t say I’m talking to so and so”, she added that she was able to speak to children individually for the necessary time only when there was other staff in the class-room (Ibid: 219). “A quiet room” is considered the ideal place for interviews by McKay (2006:203) but I wonder to what extent this responds to her criteria of practicality.

Obviously all this is suitable with learners beyond the initial stage and the same cannot be expected from complete beginners or very young children. With them the teacher should employ all the support strategies that, providing some form of input, enable children to show comprehension and the existence of at least rudimentary speaking skills. Examples of this are either/or questions, questions aiming at the identification of an object, a colour, a number; use of visual aids etc.

Observation has the advantage of focussing on learners during the ordinary classroom life catching the features of their performance when they act in complete spontaneity and without intruding on regular activities; there is no interference caused by anxiety or by negative attitudes that the older ones might begin to adopt when they know they are assessed (cheating, for example). The disadvantage is that it is not always easy for the teacher to jot down accurate notes during the flow of the lesson. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Rea-Dickins and Gardener, 2000 and Rea Dickins, 2001 in the recommended reading.

Observation, notwithstanding the limitations pointed out in the above articles and the risk that attention is concentrated on the children that tend to participate more at least in the activities done in plenary, seems to be very suitable for appraisal with content-based teaching. The open-ended tasks and questions typical of content based approaches give all learners the opportunity to show what they can do, be it one word answers or more elaborated utterances. Through systematic observation, the teacher will have a profile of how each child constructs his/her interlanguage system and a track of his/her familiarising with the patterns of the target language. As you may...
remember, in Unit 9 there was some insistence on the concept of familiarizing learners with various aspects of the target language, versus that of expecting complete learning of closed lists of items at fixed points in the process.

With observation, the distinction between teaching and assessing is blurred and assessment becomes a powerful formative strategy provided action is taken as a consequence of the feedback gathered. In many cases, action is taken on the spot as when, during the course of a lesson, feedback from the class or from individual learners suggests the need for immediate adaptation of the original plan. This “on the run” assessment “takes place as teaching and learning proceeds” and is not a separate activity from teaching (McKay, 2006:157). In other cases, the feedback is the result of planned observation and the analysis of assessment data may develop either into action towards the whole class or towards individual learners. In the former case it influences the planning of teaching adjusting plans or making new ones (examples: different use of L1 and L2, introduction of new media or managing the class in a different way or whatever seems to be conducive to more and better learning). In the latter case it refers to the adoption of personalized strategies to support those learners that, for whatever reason, need special help. Feedback from assessment may even become the inspiration for an action research project. Working in this way, the teacher is constantly helped to reflect on his/her teaching and, at the same time, has the possibility of monitoring individual learners and also use the data for summative assessment. Both interviews and observation are ways of assessing direct language use.

10.3.2 Other assessment modalities

This section deals with assessment procedures alternative to conventional ways of monitoring learners’ performance and progress. Their adoption is increasing with learners of all ages and especially young learners. They are based on the assumption that linguistic performance is influenced by contextual and personal factors and therefore assessment should be conducted in learner-friendly ways enabling language users to perform at their best. Besides it should have a formative aim even when conducted for a summative purpose. Other features are:

- The focus on the description of what learners can do especially in terms of communicative skills; this should be based on performance rather than on knowledge or mastery of specific language items.
- The frequent use of self-assessment practices.
- The adoption of activity types identical or as close as possible to those used in teaching, including pair and group work or the gathering of data from ordinary classroom activities.
- The possibility for learners to avail themselves of some forms of help.
- The creation of an anxiety-free environment.
The following assessment types share some or all of the characteristics described above.

**Portfolios.**

The introduction of portfolios into education comes from the idea of extending to this sector a wide-spread practice in the field of art that consists of a collection of examples of what designers, painters and architects have produced in order to show it for promotion. There is a vast terminology trying to distinguish various types of portfolios, however, in language learning, it is customary to consider two basic types: the process-oriented learning or “working” portfolios and the product-oriented or “show-case” ones. Working portfolios can include various kinds of process-related materials such as drafts and submitted works, reflections by the owner (the learner), comments by the teacher, and checklists for self evaluation with reference to clearly defined learning objectives (Kohonen, 2001). Show-case portfolios are used to document language learning outcomes for a variety of purposes: “for giving marks in schools or institutions; for applying to a higher education institution; or it can be compiled for the purpose of documenting language skills when applying for a job” (Ibid: 7). The supporters of this model argue that it can be used also for summative purposes, with the advantage that it is based on performance samples of various types and produced at different times. “Provided that the purpose of portfolio contents is to expand understanding of a student’s growth based on multiple measures, different kinds of test and non-test data can be included in a portfolio” (Pierce & O’Malley, 1991:2).

In the case of YLs, the pedagogic value of any instrument we use is a priority and consequently, what is important is the identification of a model that contributes to language development and motivation. “There is no right way to design a portfolio” (Ibid: 16). However, ideally it should combine a documentation of the learner’s progress over time through a collection of examples of his/her work and reflective activities leading him/her to the awareness of his/her achievements, strategies and personal language learning objectives. Although the teacher’s support is essential especially with young and very young learners, the owners of portfolios are the students themselves that get to know their progress, learning style and goals through the dynamic process of taking responsibility for compiling them.

Besides the pedagogic function of making learning visible to students, portfolios have the advantage of increasing the teacher’s knowledge of learners and of their perception of the course. They also increase visibility of progress for other stakeholders such as families, institutions and new teachers. In this latter case, they might be an opportunity for the new teachers to get to know the learners’ achieved outcomes and preferences, when learners move to a new school or there is a change of teacher.
As just said, the adoption of portfolios has many advantages but it poses also some problems; portfolios are time demanding for both teachers and learners as they require that a remarkable quantity of time is devoted to them; in FL contexts most of this work cannot realistically be done in the target language and therefore it is necessary to find a balance between this and other activities. The use of the native language in assessment is, however, considered an advantage by some including Pierce & O’Malley (1991). Another difficulty is given by the criteria to choose and store the materials to include as also multimedia examples of language performance would be highly desirable. This is the reason why electronic portfolios have been introduced in some contexts. (See Ali, 2005 and Barrett, 2007 in the recommended reading.). A possible practical line of action could be that of thinking of a selective portfolio documenting the experiences in a particular sector of language learning such as reading or learning to learn. An example of a selective portfolio is the one on writing that candidates have to submit for the Trinity integrated skills examinations. The contrast between the contribution of portfolios in increasing communication between learners and teachers and their validity as a summative assessment tool is focussed by Cohen, 1994. He argues that, in many cases, grades tend to cluster together and assessors do not really pay enough attention to the variation in quality within each portfolio.

A special type of portfolio for language learners is the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and there are now various validated examples also for young learners. The ELP is a document in which learners from age four onwards can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. Its aims are the provision of a record of the learners’ skills and the enhancement of motivation and autonomous learning. The focus is not just on language but also on the development of the cultural dimension. It consists of three sections:

- the language passport providing a continuously updated overview of the learner’s proficiency in different languages including the native language;
- the language biography which is a sort of learning diary facilitating the reflection on the learner’s contact with the target language and culture in whatever way it takes place;
- the dossier which is a selection of written and recorded materials illustrating the achievements or experiences recorded in the other two sections.

If you are interested in knowing more about the ELP look at http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/

### Task 6

**Part 1**

Look at the section “Validated models” at [http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/) or
google “European Language Portfolio children” and find out examples of validated Portfolios for young learners of different ages. Examine one or two and say how they would suit your context and how they should be modified for use in your context.

If you are looking for one all in English visit http://www.nacell.org.uk/resources/pub_cilt/portfolio_revised.pdf or see Appendix F3 in your module blackboard.

Part 2

Appendix D is an extract from the portfolio of a nine-year-old Italian girl. What does this extract tell us about her?

Learning logs and dialogue journals

A log or diary is for learners to make comments on what they do in class and to record what they have learnt and also their difficulties. This tool needs adaptation for young learners and its use can be facilitated with the provision of a guided version or a classroom version. (For an example, see Appendix E)

K-W-L charts

These consist in a chart with three columns. In the first learners write what they know about a specified topic, in the second what they want to learn, in the third what they have learnt. They can be used preferably with the 10/12 age group with reference to a specific learning unit or at the beginning and the end of a term or a school year for general language competence or a particular language skill. (See an adapted version in Appendix C2 in unit 4). A modified version, with an additional column after the second, is the KWHL chart where learners are invited to write also “how” they intend to work to achieve the desired goal. (For an example see www.education-world.com/tools_templates/kwhl_nov2002.doc).

Self-assessment grids and scales

Learners of all ages often assess themselves in many informal ways. Children tell carers or peers how they feel with reference to particular activities: Example: I can understand the teacher but I find it difficult to understand CDs... exercise 3 was very easy and I think I got it right... I know many words but I don’t remember their spelling. These spontaneous observations generally tend to focus on the difficulties except in the early phases of a course in which most learners seem to grasp everything easily and proudly articulate what they can do. (I’ve always been puzzled by this phenomenon and wondered if it is due to strong initial motivation or to the fact that teachers tend to pay more attention to the teaching procedures in the early phases of courses!)
The above described phenomenon tells us that especially the older group of young learners can be guided to accurate assessment of their linguistic abilities with the use of appropriate means and criteria. A practice session once in awhile would be beneficial. Peer assessment is a more delicate issue and, to be feasible and effective, the classroom environment should be one of reciprocal trust and support.

**Task 7**

Appendix F provides examples of self-assessment grids and scales. With reference to your context, for which age group and course, if any, would they be suitable? How would you adapt them? Would you present them in L1 or English? Give reasons for your answers.

**Pair and group activities and projects**

Assessing pair and group activities is probably the most “alternative” procedure as it implies an assessment culture that accepts cooperation between those to be assessed. It does not refer only to the traditional situation in which a pair is given an interactive task but also to activities that lead to a product which is the result of a joint venture. In other words the merit or demerit of the product is equally shared by all the members of the pair or group.

**Task 8**

Look at the following examples of activities that need cooperation between learners. Identify the kind of relationship to be expected in each of them.

- How would you consider the activities valid?
- How would you consider them reliable?
- Would you argue that they are suitable for formative assessment? Why? And what about summative assessment?

**Activity 1**

Child A receives the A card and child B receives the B card. They cannot see each other’s cards and have to find the differences (See Appendix G)

**Activity 2**

(in pairs) read and do

*How to make an accordion book*

*You need a strip of paper about 5 inches high and 25 inches long, some cardboard, coloured pencils, glue, and scissors.*

*Fold the long strip of paper in a zigzag. Cut two pieces of cardboard a bit bigger*
than one of the pages. Glue one piece to the first page and one to the last. Put the book under something heavy for a while to flatten it. Decorate the front and each page with drawings.

**Activity 3** See Appendix H From Balbi 2006: 42, R 23
In groups prepare the performance of this story and then present it to the class.

**Activity 4** After the class has watched a story you can ask learners to get into groups of three and report about three from the following (to be chosen according to the story). *Characters in the story; colours in the story; animals in the story, places in the story; objects in the story, magic words in the story* Each child will report about a category. This can be done as a competition and the group that remembers more terms is the winner.

It is immediately evident that the kind of interaction expected in Activity 1 is different from that required in the others. In the first activity the partners influence each other but their roles and performance are easily distinguishable and identifiable if a pair is observed or filmed. The same could happen with the second activity and would be acceptable for formative assessment. However, as there is one final product, the book to be made, to which both learners have contributed, I would suggest that, for summative assessment, both members of the pair should be treated in the same way. Evaluating the activity as a joint effort would convey important messages to the learners who would look at work with a partner as something serious and worthy of personal commitment. Academic children would have an opportunity to appreciate the contribution of their manually talented peers and the latter ones would gain confidence and motivation from a hopefully positive result.

In the third activity it would be possible to distinguish the quality of the performance of the various participants, but, in my opinion, the feedback given should consider the whole task holistically. Acting in a different way would destroy the meaning of group work as an opportunity for everybody to be responsible for the accomplishment of the task. “If children often work in groups during the lesson then it is logical to assess them in groups, too.” (Pinter: 2006: 137)

The last activity implies common search and revision of vocabulary and reciprocal help to try to remember as many words as possible. It also allows children to find their linguistic strengths. So stronger students, for example, may volunteer for the most difficult category. The activity is designed in a way to make every member of the group potentially dependent on the others for preparation and individually responsible in the reporting phase. The teacher can distinguish the differences in performance for formative aims but the score gained in the competition goes to the whole group, so emphasising the value of everybody’s work to achieve a common goal.
I would argue that pair and group activities provide valid and reliable assessment in as much as they elicit performance in conditions similar to those of the ordinary classroom life. They also tend to be anxiety-free and therefore put learners in the condition of performing at the top of their abilities; weak students can be encouraged by the better results they get. This does not mean loss of general validity and reliability, however, as valid and reliable assessment comes from a variety of sources.

As conclusion to this section there is a reflection on the possibility of allowing some forms of support during assessment. Probably most of us come from a culture of “closed books” and may have objections to this idea at least in summative contexts. Most teachers, however, support learners’ oral performance in many ways, without being fully aware of the type and quantity of help they give. I would suggest that whenever we interact with YLs, we should do our best to be facilitating interlocutors so that they can react positively and the assessment activity can become a further opportunity for developing language skills. This facilitating role should aim at challenging learners to use the target language to express their personal meanings in a spontaneous way which the teacher/assessor can encourage with positive body language, positive back-channelling and a sympathetic ear.

**Task 9**

“Support”, in a technical sense, refers to the modification of a task through differentiation or accommodation to tailor it to the ability of a particular learner or group of learners. (McKay, 2006)

Have you ever used support in assessing YLs? If you have, make examples and describe the impact of your action on learners.

Which of the following accommodation strategies would you consider supportive of YL? Can you think of their advantages and drawbacks?

- Additional examples
- Extra time to complete the task
- Instructions given orally by the teacher
- Instructions in L1
- Possibility of consulting textbook and/or exercise book
- Possibility of looking at posters with key-sentences
- Possibility of looking at vocabulary cards
- Possibility of asking the teacher one or two questions
- Reduction of the number of the task requirements
- Simplification of the task requirements
- Use of bilingual dictionary
- Use of monolingual dictionary
Use of simplified or shorter listening or reading texts

Probably you would not consider all the above examples equally suitable for YLs and some might even be a cause of additional difficulty especially with the youngest group: e.g. the use of dictionaries. While we cannot deny that some forms of support can help the children that, for any reason, would perform below the average without it, we should also find ways for them to bridge the gap between their proficiency level and their linguistic needs. This is an extremely important issue in all contexts and an urgent one in ESL contexts.

10.3.3 Recording and reporting results

Every teacher has his/her own informal way of recording learners’ performance especially when used for formative purposes and official assessment is not required.

This section focuses on the relationship between assessment procedures and ways of giving feedback to learners and other stake-holders when this has to be communicated in a structured way.

**Task 10**

Rea –Dickins and Gardner (2000) discuss how the same data can be used both for summative and formative assessment (assessment for learning). “Our research in the EAL context provide clear evidence of data from assessments feeding into future planning for individual or groups of learners in a variety of ways (i.e., formative use of data), as well as informing decision making on the attainment levels (i.e. a summative representation of learner performance).” (ibid: 17).

- Have you ever used data in this way?
- What is your opinion about this practice?
- Do you think that formative and summative assessment can be integrated or do you think they should be clearly distinct?

Give reasons and provide examples

Have you ever experienced a tension between the requirements of formative assessment and those of summative assessment, regulated by fixed criteria? How would you try to cope with this situation?

If you are interested in this issue, read McNamara (2001) and see how it could suggest research areas useful for the YL context.
Most of the procedures considered in the previous sections have a strong formative component; however, I would argue that they could also be used for summative purposes. In this case, each of them is generally associated with a specific way of recording and reporting results and giving feedback.

Discrete-point marking schemes are used for tests as the latter have clear-cut answers. Discrete-point marking schemes are usually translated into a number or a mark. Although this system is easy and quick, it has a pedagogic drawback; it does not give the children or the parents any information about what the children have been assessed in. For this reason “it is better if the number or mark is accompanied by a comment (usually in the mother tongue) addressing the individual performance of each child”. (Iannou & Pavlou, 2003:15).

**Task 11**

Analyse this example from Iannou & Pavlou, 2003. Would you use it as it is or would you adapt it? If you think it needs some adaptation, give your reasons.

**Assessing recognition of animal names (reading)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 - 10</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>You can read the names of all the animals we learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>You can read the names of animals well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 5</td>
<td>Good but you could do even better</td>
<td>You can read the names of some animals. What about the rest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 2</td>
<td>Try harder! You can do it!</td>
<td>You can try harder to learn to read the names of the animals: Would you like that? Can I help you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I like the idea of comments but my first thought about the above is the objection to the use of “good” for the 3 – 5 score. Encouraging learners does not mean telling them they are good when they are not; learning to cope with partially unsuccessful events is part of growth (but this is a personal opinion!).

Check - lists are often used to record the children’s performance in oral interviews, in written work and when observed. Some are constructed for a specific assessment event, as for instance to see the learners’ achievement of the content of a Unit in the text-book. An example is the one below adapted from Vale, 1990: 30.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Activities completed</th>
<th>Can understand TPR instructions</th>
<th>Can give TPR instructions</th>
<th>Can understand questions about family</th>
<th>Can give true answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008
Others are based on more general descriptors. With checklists, the emphasis is on assessing how relevant aspects of teaching have been accomplished. Scales are similar to checklists, however “the emphasis is on placing the person rated on a series of bands” (CEFR: 189). Some scales are holistic and offer one general descriptor for each level. Others are analytic and focus on different aspects of the performance. In the CEFR there are scales of both types.

**Task 12**

Here are examples of descriptors from different checklists and scales. Read them carefully and identify what they have in common and what makes them different.

- Which, if any, would you consider suitable for assessing young learners?
- Would you use it as it is or would you adapt it in some way?
- If you think that adaptation is needed, how would you adapt it?

Give reasons for your answers.

From Pierce & O’Malley, 1991: 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Task</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands literal meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draws inference from reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abridged from CEFR conversation scale, page 76

**A2 Can establish social contact: greetings and farewells; introductions; giving thanks.**

*Can generally understand clear, standard speech on familiar matters directed at him/her, provided He/she can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time. Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest. Can express how he/she feels in simple terms, and express thanks. Can make and respond to invitations, suggestions and apologies.*
Can say what he/she likes and dislikes.

**A1** Can make an introduction and use basic greetings and leave-taking expressions. Can ask how people are and react to news.

Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker.

... 

For other examples, look at Hasselgren, 2000: 276-277

...

From 2004 State of Wisconsin Framework for Classroom Instruction and Assessment

English Language Proficiency Standard 2

Domain: **Speaking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Level 1 Entering</th>
<th>Level 2 Beginning</th>
<th>Level 3 Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>• take risks with new language (such as participate in choral recitation, songs, chants, nursery rhymes)</td>
<td>• interact in small group or paired activities</td>
<td>• converse about classroom and social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>• describe self with words and gestures (such as features, clothing, or likes and dislikes)</td>
<td>• compare self with other familiar persons (such as friends, family members, or movie stars)</td>
<td>• compare self with characters in literary works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>• answer WH-questions regarding visually supported information on ads, cartoons, signs, or posters</td>
<td>• restate or paraphrase visually supported information from newspapers, magazines, or brochures</td>
<td>• present reviews from newspapers/magazines (such as cartoons or advice columns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>• state facts about personal interests or those of friends or members of your family</td>
<td>• do task analyses of familiar processes (such as recipes [how to make X] and games [how to play X])</td>
<td>• give narrative speeches on personal topics of interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are interested in knowing more about this example consult: [http://www.wida.us/standards/elp2004standards.aspx](http://www.wida.us/standards/elp2004standards.aspx)

*Written by Rita Balbi
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Scales are useful for the teacher to record learners’ performance, but their language is often beyond what YLs or families would understand. The ideal, but not always feasible, way to communicate strong and weak points to YLs is probably the individual conference in which a child receives personal attention, his/her privacy is respected and there are opportunities for the development of interaction with the teacher in a sheltered situation.

In the case of assessment portfolios, the teacher should identify criteria for determining how the collection of items meets the expected standards and give learners clear indications of the items required and those which are optional. The content should be interpreted also taking into account the context in which the items included have been done. (At school? At home? With how much help? Etc.)

As conclusion to this section, Task 13 will be an opportunity for you to reflect on some practical aspects of assessment that, however, reflect your approach.

**Task 13**

Answer the following:
In assessing YLs’ oral performance, how would you consider
- Grammatical appropriacy?
- Vocabulary range?
- Phonetic appropriacy?
- Meaning?

If you had to give a score, how much would each of them contribute to the final mark?

In assessing the learners’ written performance how would you consider
- Grammatical appropriacy?
- Vocabulary range?
- Focus and organization of text?
- Content?
If you had to give a score, how much would each of them contribute to the final mark?

In assessing listening comprehension would you use
- Physical response?
In assessing reading comprehension would you use:
• Physical response?
• Pictures?
• L1?
• Role-plays?
How?

In designing assessment tasks would you include the repetition of activities already done many times or activities requiring the use of learning in new and even creative ways?

Which of the following is the most important for you?
Coherence of assessment to what has been actually taught?
Coherence of assessment to the syllabus?
Coherence of assessment to the learners’ out of class linguistic needs?

This section has led you to reflect on the complexity of issues of internal assessment through reflection on your experience and reference to research work in this area. The following section will examine external assessment.

10.4 External assessment

10.4.1 Preliminary Considerations

Many countries have their own forms of external assessment but this section will deal only with some of those that are potentially available world-wide, through institutions that assess and certify competence in EFL at international level. The possibility of submitting YLs to this kind of assessment is a controversial issue and there are very good reasons both in favour and against; here, as with other aspects of learning/teaching, YLs is too comprehensive a term and there can be a distinction between various age groups and contexts, of course. The following task will help you to become aware of where you stand on this issue.

Task 14

Imagine you are teaching in one of the following situations. Identify your reasons for supporting or not supporting the suggested proposal.
• You are teaching at a private language school in a country where English is a foreign language. The children come when they are seven or eight years old and generally continue until they are ten or eleven. You give a 90 minute session per week. The director suggests that at the end of each school year, the children take one of the Cambridge exams for young learners.

• You are teaching in a state school in a country where English is a second language. The school has its internal assessment system for all subjects including English. You teach the 11/13 age group for five 45 minute periods per week. Some parents suggest that the school prepares these students for an external certification. The headteacher likes this idea and tries to push you in this direction.

• Alternative. The headteacher does not like this idea and tries to push you to support her point of view.

In doing the previous task you have reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of each of the above proposals. If you are in a position of having a say about similar issues in your context, you might consider if and how the exam would affect learning and motivation, the backwash effect on teaching and the practical advantages for those passing the exams. The costs for families should not be underestimated. Do you think your course would gain credibility if your students took and passed an exam leading to a certification?

10.4.2 Exams for young learners

In this section we are going to explore two different exams for young learners in order to get to know their main features. This will enable you to make informed choices about them if this is required in your context.


The word “tests” here is used to indicate a set of assessment procedures and not standardized tests. There are four levels: Firstwords, Springboard, Quickmarch and Breakthrough. The tests are focussed on the ability to use the target language communicatively with reference to a context (a British family on whose life the paper tests are constructed); learners are assessed in the four skills at all levels. A syllabus for each level is provided. It consists of two parts: a statement of the general objectives of the test and a “Language Content” section. As an example, here are the general objectives for Firstwords: “This test is designated to motivate and reward young learners who have just started learning English in an academic context. It may be particularly useful for learners who have had to master the use of the Roman alphabet”. The “Language Content” section is divided into:
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Teaching Young Learners Unit 10

- “Area of Language Use”, examples: “introduce and greet people” (from Firstwords); “talk about likes and dislikes” (from Springboard); “talk about past events” (from Quickmarch); “ask for/give opinions” (from Breakthrough).
- “Main structures”, examples: “Has/have got” (from Firstwords); “adverbs of frequency” (from Springboard); “can for permission” (from Quickmarch); “first conditional form with if” (from Breakthrough).
- “Topics and vocabulary”, examples: “Houses” (from Firstwords); “homes” (from Springboard); “spare time” (from Quickmarch); “nature” (from Breakthrough).

The time allotted for the written paper is one hour; it includes:
- Two listening tasks, examples: “picture identification”, “multiple choice” and “short written answers”, (only at Quickmarch and Breakthrough levels).
- Four reading and writing tasks, examples, “matching questions and answers”, “matching utterances to situations”, “filling in gaps in a text” and “writing a narrative based on pictures” (only at Breakthrough level).
- An oral part consisting in the participation in a board game and an individual activity. The oral part is conducted by a trained examiner.

Out of a maximum total of 100 marks, 30 are allotted to the listening tasks, 50 to the reading and writing tasks and 20 to speaking; the criteria for speaking are appropriate vocabulary grammar accuracy (with reference to the level) and understandable pronunciation. Certificates are awarded for Pass, Merit and Distinction at each level.

For more information and sample papers go to

http://www.pearsonlanguageassessments.com/home/exams/ltefc/

Cambridge Young learners English Tests (Information drawn from the Cambridge Young learners English Tests Handbook, updated for 2007 tests)

Cambridge offers three assessment levels: Starters, Movers and Flyers. The aims of the tests, as presented in the handbook, are fair and accurate assessment, presentation of a positive first impression of international tests and enhancing of effective teaching and learning. Learners are tested in the four skills and at each level there is an increase in the number of tasks and of the exam time. For each level there is a “list of topics”, a “grammar and structures list” and an “alphabetical vocabulary list”. Here are some examples from the topics: “colours”, “family and friends”, “school”, “the world around us”. All candidates who complete the test receive an Award, which focuses on what they can do. This system aims at preventing the disappointment and the discouragement likely to originate from failure.

For more information and sample papers go to
Task 15

Study the syllabus and exam format of one of the levels of the previously described exams and, with a specific class in mind, answer the following:

- Would the exam be a motivating factor or a source of anxiety for you? For the class?
- How does the syllabus match with your syllabus and textbook?
- How does the exam format match with the activities you normally do in class?
- How do the topics match with those that appeal to your learners?
- If you had to prepare that class for the exam, how would you adapt and modify your teaching? Which of the four skills would need more attention? Would you focus more on language use or on the knowledge of specific language items?

If you already teach students who take these exams, what do you think are the main strengths of the exam, and what are the weaknesses?

10.4.3 Other exams accessible to young learners

The two exams considered above have been specifically designed for young learners, but some of the ordinary certification exams are potentially accessible also to them as, for instance, the first six grades of the Trinity Spoken English Exams, the 0 level of The Trinity Integrated Skills in English examinations (ISE) and The Cambridge KET (Key English Test). Except for the Trinity Spoken English Exams, these exams are suitable only for the older group of young learners because of their cognitive demands.

Trinity Spoken English Exams (information drawn from www.trinitycollege.co.uk)

The Trinity Spoken English Exams are a series of oral exams which assess the candidates’ conversation skills and the ability to discuss a prepared topic (this from grade 4 onwards). The syllabus consists of

- “Communicative skills” (examples from grade 4 “ask the examiner at least one question about the topic area”, “show understanding of the examiner by responding appropriately to questions”)
- “Subject areas” (examples from grade 4 “Shops”, “weekend/seasonal activities”)
- “Functions” (examples from grade 4 “expressing simple comparisons”, “expressing likes and dislikes”)

Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008

http://www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/yle.html
• “Language production” (Grammar, Lexis, Phonology) (Examples from grade 4 “comparatives and superlatives”, “adverbs of frequency: sometimes, often, never”, “three different ways of pronouncing “ed” past tense endings, e.g. played, walked, wanted).

The language content and the exam time increase at each grade. What makes this exam unique is that the format is just a conversation with the examiner on a topic chosen by the candidate and on two topics listed in the syllabus; besides, as far as I know, it is the only exam in which candidates are required to ask the examiner spontaneous questions in the flow of the conversation. The criteria for passing are coverage of the communicative skills and language content, accurate and appropriate use of the grammatical, lexical and phonological items required for the grade and fluency appropriate for the grade. The candidate’s performance is assessed selecting one of four levels of performance: Distinction (A), Merit (B), Pass (C) and Fail (D).

The 0 level of *The Trinity Integrated Skills in English examinations* (ISE) (information drawn from *Integrated Skills in English examinations*, Trinity College, London and [www.trinitycollege.co.uk](http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk))

This exam consists of a written and an oral part. The written paper requires the completion of two tasks eliciting a written production with reference to input in the form of a text to be read. Example: Answering to a letter (75 words). The time allowed is 45 minutes. The oral part consists of an interview similar to that of the spoken examinations except for the discussion of the topic at the candidate’s choice which is replaced by the discussion of a Portfolio; this is a collection of written tasks selected from the list issued every year on the Trinity website.

For more information on the Trinity exams, consult [www.trinitycollege.co.uk](http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk)

*The Cambridge KET* (Key English Test) (Information drawn from *Key English Test Handbook*, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations).

The KET exam covers the four skills. It consists of three papers as follows:

- Paper 1 includes reading and writing; the aim of the first five tasks is the assessment of candidates’ ability to understand the meaning of written English at word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and whole text level; the aim of parts 6-9 focuses on the assessment of basic writing skills. The allotted time is one hour and ten minutes.
- Paper 2 is for listening and its aim is the assessment of candidates’ ability to understand dialogues and monologues on a range of everyday topics. The texts are delivered at slow, but not unnatural pace. The allotted time is thirty minutes.
- Paper 3 is for speaking. The oral interview lasts 8/10 minutes for each pair of candidates. In the first part candidates interact with an examiner and the second is a pair-work task.
The syllabus consists of “Language Purposes” (example: “giving and obtaining factual information”); “Language functions” (example: “expressing and finding out attitudes”); “Inventory of Functions, Notions and Communicative Tasks” (example: “asking for and giving the spelling and meaning of words”); “Inventory of Grammatical Areas” (Example: “Modals” with specification of items such as can – ability, request, permission) “Topics” (example: “food and drink”). There is no “inventory” for “Lexis” and the requirements for this component are articulated as general statements about “everyday vocabulary”.

For more information see the KET English Test Handbook or consult http://www.cambridgeesol.org/support/dloads/ket_downloads.htm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study the syllabus and exam format of one grade of the Trinity spoken English examinations and, with a specific class in mind, answer the questions suggested in Task 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the same for either <em>Trinity ISE 0</em> or for <em>Cambridge KET</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the exams described in 10.4, would you consider more authentic? May be you are in a position to apply as an examiner for one of the exams described in 10.4. Which would you prefer? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.5 Looking ahead

This is the last Unit of the module and probably it has meant hard work because of the variety and intensity of the subjects covered. Our initial topic was an exploration of the reasons for assessing YLs’ English performance and proficiency and then we moved to consider some general issues with a special focus on the features of fair assessment. While the third part, dealing with internal assessment, was an overview of different assessment approaches to be used in the classroom, the fourth consisted in a description of some common exam types available at international level. I hope you have found this journey worthwhile and enjoyable. If you are keeping a personal diary you might reflect on the following:

- What has this unit revealed to you about your assessment culture?
- Has the unit suggested any insights to try out in the classroom?
- Is there anything that would need further exploration because it is not clear yet or because it seems particularly relevant to your context?

If you are thinking of an assignment on this subject, which areas would you like to research? There are many areas still unexplored especially with reference to young learners.

*Written by Rita Balbi
May 2008*
References


- **Christ, F. and others.** 1997. *European Language Portfolio Proposals for Development.* Council of Europe


- **Edelenbos, P.** 1997. “Evaluation and Assessment”. In *Foreign language learning in primary schools*. Council of Europe


- **Integrated Skills in English examinations.** 2005 -2007 Trinity College, London


- **Key English Test Handbook,** University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations


• McKay, P. 2006. *Assessing Young Language Learners*. O.U.P.


• Pinter, A. 2006. *Teaching Young Language learners*. O.U.P.


Evaluation and assessment should be designed so as to provide information to various appropriate groups on the extent to which goals are achieved. (Edelenbos, 1997: 69).

Assessment is needed to help teachers and administrators make decisions about students’ linguistic abilities, their placement in appropriate levels, and their achievements… assessment becomes a diagnostic tool that provides feedback to the learner and the teacher about the suitability of the curriculum and instructional materials, the effectiveness of the teaching methods, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Furthermore, it helps demonstrate to young learners that they are making progress in their linguistic development, which can boost motivation. (Shaaban, 2001:17).

Assessment is carried out because head teachers, school authorities, and parents require evidence of learning but it is also the right of the children to know how they are doing. (Pinter, 2006. 131 adapted).

It would seem reasonable to require assessment to serve teaching, by providing feedback on pupils’ learning that would make the next teaching event more effective, in a positive, upwards direction (Cameron, 2001: 215).

We identify four key dimensions to assessment at primary level: evaluative, administrative, formative and certification functions. (Rixon, 1999: 95).

There are many different purposes for assessment. There are sometimes tensions between pedagogic purposes for assessment, aimed primarily at promoting learning and administrative purposes for assessment, aimed primarily at furnishing information about the performance of children and schools to Education Department

Appendix A

Evaluation and assessment should be designed so as to provide information to various appropriate groups on the extent to which goals are achieved. (Edelenbos, 1997: 69).

Assessment is needed to help teachers and administrators make decisions about students’ linguistic abilities, their placement in appropriate levels, and their achievements… assessment becomes a diagnostic tool that provides feedback to the learner and the teacher about the suitability of the curriculum and instructional materials, the effectiveness of the teaching methods, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Furthermore, it helps demonstrate to young learners that they are making progress in their linguistic development, which can boost motivation. (Shaaban, 2001:17).

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We identify four key dimensions to assessment at primary level: evaluative, administrative, formative and certification functions. (Rixon, 1999: 95).

There are many different purposes for assessment. There are sometimes tensions between pedagogic purposes for assessment, aimed primarily at promoting learning and administrative purposes for assessment, aimed primarily at furnishing information about the performance of children and schools to Education Department
administrators and others, who use this information for management and accountability purposes. (McKay, 2006: 21).

To find out whether pupils like/dislike particular activities and why (Moon, 2005: 149)

Appendix B

Assessment types

- Achievement assessment
- Alternative assessment
- Analytic assessment
- Authentic assessment
- Continuous assessment
- Criterion-referencing assessment
- External assessment
- Formal assessment
- Formative assessment
- Holistic assessment
- Internal assessment
- Knowledge assessment
- Norm-referencing assessment
- Performance assessment
- Placement assessment
- Proficiency assessment
- Self-assessment
- Summative assessment
- Traditional assessment

Appendix C

- *Achievement assessment* refers to the assessment of the course being taught (CEFR: 183).
- *Alternative assessment* refers to an alternative to standardized testing (Huerta-Macias 2002: 339).
- *Analytic assessment* looks at different aspects separately, assigning separate results to a number of different aspects of performance (CEFR: 190).
- *Authentic assessment* is one of the labels used to describe alternative assessment (Huerta-Macias, 2002: 339).
Assessment that measures a student's ability to perform a “real world” task (Northern Illinois University Assessment Terms Glossary: 2).

Assessment that reflects the kind of language children use in the classroom or need in situations outside the classroom (McKay, 2006:113).

• **Continuous assessment** refers to the observation carried out by the teacher during the teaching/learning process (CEFR: 185); it is also called on-going assessment and “on the run assessment” (McKay, 2006:152); generally it has a formative purpose and is characterized by informality; it is often followed by immediate feedback.

• **Criterion-referencing assessment** is the assessment based on criteria such as descriptors or curriculum standards (CEFR: 184).

• **External assessment** is prepared and conducted by others than the teacher (McKay, 2006:20).

• **Formal assessment** refers to assessment conducted with established procedures and at specific times as, for example, an exam.

• **Formative assessment** is an ongoing process of gathering information on learning or on strong and weak points that the teacher uses to give feedback to learners and to improve teaching. It is sometimes called assessment for learning. (McKay, 2006: 68 and 140 adapted).

• **Holistic assessment** consists of a global synthetic judgement (CEFR: 190)

• **Internal assessment** is prepared and conducted by the teacher (McKay, 2006:20).

• **Knowledge assessment** requires the learner to answer questions “to provide evidence of the extent of their linguistic knowledge” (CEFR: 187).

• **Norm-referencing assessment** is ranking the students in relation to their peers, using the results of assessment (CEFR: 186).

• **Performance assessment** requires the learner to provide a sample of language in speech or writing (CEFR: 187).

• **Placement assessment** refers to the assessment procedures used to place learners in the most appropriate class or group (McKay, 2006:23 adapted).

• **Proficiency assessment** is assessment of what someone can do with reference “to the application of the subject in the real world”, irrespective of the content of the course followed (CEFR: 183).

• **Self-assessment** is when learners themselves appraise their performance or proficiency (CEFR: 191).

• **Summative assessment** “sums up attainment at the end of the course with a grade” (CEFR: 186).

• **Traditional assessment** is carried out with standardized texts or similar procedures ((Huerta-Macias, 2002: 339).
Extracts from the portfolio of a nine-year-old Italian girl

Self-assessment grid from the language biography (The original is in Italian)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sing Heads Shoulders Knees and Toes</td>
<td>3rd October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say the names of months</td>
<td>29th October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak about my cat</td>
<td>10th November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write a Christmas card</td>
<td>15th December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describe an invented animal</td>
<td>16th December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understand and tell a bit of the Canterville Ghost</td>
<td>2nd February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say the rhyme one two buckle my shoe</td>
<td>26th February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count up to 100</td>
<td>18 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read a book from the class library</td>
<td>22nd April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell the time</td>
<td>5th May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say and write many words</td>
<td>8th June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index of documents that I include in the dossier (the “reason” section is in Italian in the original document)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>date</th>
<th>document</th>
<th>reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10th September</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>I've included the CD of Britney Spears because she is my favourite singer. It has some nice songs. It's the birthday present from my parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th December</td>
<td>Crazy Animals</td>
<td>I've included the drawing and description of the Crazy Animal because I liked the idea of drawing an animal that I had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd February</td>
<td>The butterfly</td>
<td>I've included the drawing of the butterfly because the drawing is well done and I enjoyed the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd March</td>
<td>What am I?</td>
<td>I've included the book “What am I?” because I liked the work we did and because the drawings I made are very nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th May</td>
<td>What is the time?</td>
<td>I've included the clock because it was a nice piece of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th May</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>The test was very easy and I got the full score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th May</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>This “true/false” test was a bit difficult and I did not get the full score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For “The Butterfly” see Appendix D on your Module Blackboard

Appendix E

The Clowns’ Circus – Diary from Balbi, 2006, Resource 27

See your module blackboard

Appendix F

F 1

From Irre Liguria materials 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have watched the DVD (title of the story)

Colour the appropriate sign

Good ☺, fairly good ☝️, Poor ☞️
I can understand the gist of the story
I can name and talk about the main characters
I can name and describe some places in the story
I can answer questions about the story
I can tell the story

New words and expressions learnt

F 2
From the CEFR Table 2: Common Reference Levels: self-assessment grid - writing page 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form</td>
<td>I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something</td>
<td>I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F 3
Appendix G

See your Module Blackboard

Appendix H

From Balbi 2006: 42, R 23

See your Module Blackboard
PREFACE

Core books
Recommended books

Unit 1 Contexts and Issues in Teaching Young Learners
Unit 2 Children as Language Learners
Unit 3 Second Language Learning in the Classroom
Unit 4 Approaches to early L2 teaching
Unit 5 Resources and Activities for Young Learners
Unit 6 Literacy, Reading and writing
Unit 7 Language in the YL Classroom
Unit 8 Interaction in the YL classroom
Unit 9 Course and Syllabus Design
Unit 10 Assessment and Evaluation

May 2008
Core books

- **Cameron, L.** 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. C.U.P.

Recommended books

- **Halliwell, S.** 1992 *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*. Longman
- **Lightbown, P. and Spada N.** 2006. *How Languages are Learned* OUP. Third edition.
- **McKay, P.** 2006. *Assessing Young Language Learners*. C.U. P.
- **Pinter, M.** 2006. *Teaching Young Language Learners*. O.U.P.