

**[Handout to accompany talk]  
Teaching a foreign language to very young learners: An English corner**

**A teaching model**

The teaching model is of the utmost importance. If the classroom educator is included in a foreign language (FL) project, it should succeed.

A pre-school English teacher needs the following skills:

- Fluency in the FL;
- A knowledge of the FL speaking cultures;
- An understanding of teaching strategies for teaching the FL to young learners;
- An understanding of child development theories.

Moon (2005)

A difficult profile to be found in any one teacher! Hence the importance of sharing skills and working as a team.

**Aims**

Sharpe (2001) describes teaching French in primary schools in Britain as being "(...) *more primary than French*", in other words the approach to languages at primary needs to be founded on good primary practice. This is even more important when we are working with pre-school children. Our goals are educational and with special attention to attitudinal, not linguistic ones. The aims and objectives of a pre-school FL have significant methodological implications. As educators we should be looking for approaches, which integrate English and emulate pre-school education methodologies.

**Role of play in Foreign Language learning**

Play has a very important role in pre-school education: play is children's work.

- Play allows children to learn when they are ready to learn;
- Play builds children's confidence in themselves and their abilities;
- Play allows for children to repeat physical and mental skills, providing confidence, mastery, and an exploration of potentials and limitations;
- Play allows for learning without threat, emphasising trial and error and the non serious aspect of learning;
- Play can be seen as a trial and error activity, with an emphasis on the non-serious, the consequences of success or failure are irrelevant.
- Play enables children to feel secure and protected, to take risks which lead to the playful exploration of variations between means and ends;
- Play allows for creative flexibility in thinking;
- Play is mediated by language, which leads to a communal learning with others.

Wood & Attfield (1996); Moyles (1989); Read (1998).

**Setting up an English corner**

There is a necessity to provide for play in the foreign language, so why not include an English corner in our pre-school classrooms? A space where children can access their English world, where children can:

- Engage in free play / in child initiated activities;
- Play English games in groups, pairs or alone;
- Browse through English books / retell stories
- Use props to role play stories
- Listen to English music;
- Chose to interact in English.

"*Instruction - both formal and informal*" should take place in many social contexts, and be performed by more knowledgeable peers, siblings or adults as living representatives of culture. (Vygotsky in Wood 1988:24)

A child's development is a "collective responsibility"; teachers and classroom peers hold new and more motivating significance. Vasconcelos (1997: 36 – 37)

The Foreign Language play activities experienced by young children should be provided as both formal and informal instruction, through directed play and free play and interaction in English should be encouraged with both pre-school educators and peers.

**Important points to remember:**

- 1) Play is structured by the environment, the materials or contexts in which it takes place;
- 2) Exploration is a preliminary to more challenging forms of play which, in the school environment, are those likely to be directed by the teacher;
- 3) Appropriately directed play will ensure the child learns from his or her current state of knowledge and skill;
- 4) Play is potentially an excellent learning medium.

(Moyles 1989:17)

**A foreign language corner can do the following:**

- Enable children to gain confidence at their own pace;
- Give children the possibility of experimenting with the foreign language;
- Make the foreign language a choice;
- Provide opportunities for children to engage purposefully in real foreign language use;
- Provide opportunities for co-operative learning;
- Naturally integrate the foreign language into the children's learning environment;
- Provide opportunities for evaluating children's attitudes towards the foreign language;
- Provide an important link between the specialist and the generalist;
- Allow the children to have fun with the foreign language, when they want to!

**References**

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