INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR PRE-SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract: *Being a teacher in a kindergarten is not as easy as it sounds. It is by far an easy job where patience, concentration and clear pedagogical goals should be definitely your allies when teaching. With the right method, you can introduce several subjects to kindergarten pupils even at this young age. An interdisciplinary approach would make the classes much more attractive and the variety of topics can be improved continuously.*
For example, when teaching the alphabet to kindergarten pupils, the teacher can help in the recognition process of letters' shapes and sounds through various associations with other things, objects, animals or other creatures from nature which can later be associated and expanded in further discussions with connections about different features that can be extracted from other subjects like Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, etc. Whenever the teacher explains the nature to the pupils, by describing the phenomenon, the transitions of seasons, of days and nights this actually prepares the children for later learning of more advanced scientific concepts. Describing the shapes, the colors, the sizes, positions and distances can represent valuable tools for children to identify objects with similar features. With the usage of flags, national hymns, maps, globes, historical little stories and other important cultural events around the world the level of understanding would increase in the classes to follow.
Keywords: *inter-disciplinarity, language teaching, pre-school pupils*

Actors and learning environment in pre-school language teaching

Our pupils'age represents the major factor in the pedagogical decisions concerning *how* and *what* to teach. People of various ages have different requirements and this also refers to the level of their competences and cognitive skills; it is well known that children of primary age are able to acquire much of a foreign language through play, whereas in case of adults, one can more or less expect a larger use of abstract thinking. The most known belief about age and language learning is that young children learn faster and much more effectively than any other age group. Young children lack this abstract kind of thinking and thus they do have the advantage of a faster capacity of memorizing and learning new things.
„All preschoolers are motivated to please their parents, teachers, and other adults. Preschoolers are motivated to play and have fun, to learn and experience new adventures in life. […] You cannot control the way they think, therefore you cannot control how they behave. Fortunately, you can influence the way they think and behave by using external motivation to influence and develop your children's internal motivation." (PhD. Sal Severe, 2002: 78)
The extent up to which children can learn is also dependant on their individual cognitive capacity and also on the originating environment.
Young children learn in a different manner from older children, adolescents and adults. Under the following aspects we can notice that this category of children respond to the actual meaning of the words even if they do not quite understand words taken as

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separately. Also, they often learn somehow indirectly rather than directly – since they actually interpret information from all sides, learning and assimilating from all the sources around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught. The thematic used in the classes should be connected to their age level and life experience so far. New knowledge cannot be introduced unless there is a prior preparation that is connected to the already existing knowledge. As the age dictates, they present a limited attention span; so the activities should be highly engaging in order for them not to get easily bored and thus lose their interest after about ten minutes. Teachers should vary the sources of their didactic materials and also encourage the pupils to take advantage of all the information sources.

According to the psychological characteristics of the early age they have a continuous need for individual attention and also teacher's approval and appraisal for their accomplishments.

An important observation relies on the fact that their understanding comes not just from whatever is being explained to them, but also from what they perceive as visual, audio and tactile inputs. The difficulty lies in grasping the abstract concepts such as grammar rules and that is why they need a direct interaction with the didactic supports. The teaching strategies should be mainly based on the children's characteristic enthusiasm and curiosity for the world around.

For this age level, the class management concerning the teaching activities is faced with the dilemma which is better: individual or group work. Psychologists and didactics specialists would strongly answer that it is preferable to have work groups to encourage developing good interactive and affective relationships. The activities should be planned for an appropriate time period, and they should also be flexible enough so as not to allow the pupils to get bored.

Young learners' teachers require a so-called observation period first to understand how their pupils think and operate and second to adjust their teaching techniques according to the observed needs of the target group.

Direct involvement in language games would increase the attention span and therefore pupils are much more willing and motivated to take part to language classes without being bored. Needless to remind the efficiency of the classic approaches with the usage of the classical repetitions or the paper-and-pencil or the chalk-and-blackboard kind of teaching techniques which are no longer interesting with the present generations who prefer the less sociable leisure activities involving the ultimate electronic devices instead of playing and socializing with their same age fellows.

Providing the children with more stimuli to learn is recommendable since the attention span and the focus can easily be directed to the linguistic target. The same language item can be taught by means of many different games and so the teacher makes sure that this way the success is guaranteed in covering the items of the curricula with a rich range of interactive activities for that age group.

Another thing to be taken into consideration is the alternation of games implying physical action with the static ones so that to offer some moments of relaxation and control the fatigue level on pupils.

During this period, the teachers are supposed to pick up relevant information on their pupils' current domains of interests so that they can facilitate, through a proper approach, activities that motivate the children.

One aspect that should never be left apart, from the psychological point of view, is the teacher's constantly monitoring the confidence level of the participants and making sure

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that the groups of winners alternate. To create equilibrated groups in terms of value the teacher should take into account the possibility of transferring pupils from one team to another whenever necessary.

Generally speaking for language learning, good oral skills are always important and this is the reason why the teacher's pronunciation really matters in this situation because children have an imitative behavior and a less consciously developed one.

To conclude, young children can learn a second language almost as easily as their native language if the correct approach is used. Playing is the most important activity the children can do in order to come closer and understand the surrounding world. It is more valuable than the other teaching methods because the children`s level of involvement is the highest possible, and their mood is thus highly interactive. "If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as *central* to a teacher's repertoire." (Andrew Wright, 1984: 2). Any game implies first the collecting of information stage, while the next one refers to finding their place in the vast puzzle of the early-age environment. The child is forced to know and use the proper vocabulary in order to be allowed to take part in the games, and this means that second language acquisition in kindergarten is mainly dependant on game playing.

Possible Games to Be Used in Second Language Teaching Practice

Any game must be preceded by a period of basic vocabulary acquisition. This is possible by means of colorful images and objects used in short and funny activities specially designed for term memorizing, and also by media devices.
Once they acquire some words, they are ready to further develop their vocabulary through all kind of language games.
Here there are 2 examples of such language games are mentioned below:
Teaching Colors to Children: Every child is given a colored cap and the teacher put the children's chairs in a circle. A small table will be put in the middle of the circle, and the teacher will stand somewhere close to the children. She will address the following command:
"Red is coming to the chair!"
The other children will reinforce this by repeating:
"Go, RED, hurry up!"
The child wearing the red cap is supposed to run and quickly put his cap on the chair in the middle. The one who doesn't act correctly or doesn't do it on time is asked to say 3 times:
"I was wrong one time!
The [*mention the color*] cap is mine!"
When all the children prove that they know the color of their cap, the caps can be changed so as every participant into the game to wear as many cap colors as possible.
Teaching Numbers to Children: Learning by heart the words representing numbers is an activity that can be easily done by means of rhymes and gestures. Raising one finger for *one*, two fingers for *two* and so on, while singing the numbers` song is not the most difficult learning activity ever. The most challenging part here is helping the children recognize each number when taken separately; so, in order to better associate the word

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with its physical representation, a good pedagogical option would be to make use of a game similar to the one below:
Every child will hold a flashcard with a certain number.
The teacher will organize the children into two groups. One child from each group will address a question to the other group:
“Are you there, no 5?
” Show your face and say us *HI*!”
No 5 will stand up and say: “Hi! I am no 5!!”
If no 5 doesn`t answer quickly, his group will lose one point.

Teaching Animals with the help of Charades. A preschool pupil stands in front of the class. The teacher shows him/her a flashcard representing an animal or word with a name of it without anyone else to see it. The pupil is asked to mime the action that connects to that animal and then rest of the class try to guess the vocabulary.

Counting madness. Before the teacher starts, this one tells the pupils that every word with a certain number in it (i.e. 5, 15, 25) is to be changed to a word such as ‘apple’ or ‘monkey’. Go around the room counting up to 100 or down from 100. If a player fails to substitute the number for the respective word they are out of the play.

Crossing the lake. The teachers draws a big lake on the floor then lays out various flashcards as stepping stones. The pupils can start on one side of the ‘lake’ and take turns to cross to the other side. When they step on a card they must say the targeted vocabulary. If they can’t do it then they ‘fall into the lake’ and have to start again. Add drama by creating a story of sharks and crocodiles lurking in the water.

Fast flashcard collecting. Reveal flashcards one by one to the pupils in the class. The first pupil to say the word on the card successfully can keep the card. In the end, the pupil with the biggest collection when all the cards have been handed out wins.

Guessing game. Ask a pupil to come to the front of the room, standing with the face to the board. Place a card behind their back, displaying to the rest of the class. The pupil asks simple questions for example ‘is it an elephant?’ ‘is it a giraffe?’, the rest of the class respond with a positive or negative answer.

Trains. Put your pupils into one or more ‘trains’ by having them line up and hold onto each other’s shoulders. Shout out words such as ‘slowly’, ‘quickly’ to direct them around the room and so on.

Clothing colours. Choose a pupil to be ‘it’. You then say a colour and ‘it’ must find a person with that colour clothing on and touch it. The pupil who has been touched then becomes ‘it’.

Number jump. Allocate each pupil a number between 1-10 (depending on how many pupils you have and what numbers you have to cover that lesson) give 2 pupils the same number, 1 on each team. Teacher shouts out a number ‘5’. Then the 2 pupils who were given the number ‘5’ should stand up and shout ‘5!’, then sit back down. The pupil who is the slowest out of the 2 or who fails to stand up and say their number at all gives the

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opposing team a point. This can be played for as long as you want and with as many numbers as you want. You can even give each pupil 2 numbers to remember each.

Now, that we presented some of the most important issues when using language games with preschool groups, we can draw some conclusions about the recommended classroom approaches.

The classic teaching would not expect the pupils to be working in groups in different parts of the classroom, changing their activity every ten minutes. The times when the children spend all their time sitting still in rows or talking only to the teacher are now gone since now, in the present, we all agree on the universal fact that children will always love discovering things, respond positively to actions involving their imagination and enjoy being involved in puzzle-like activities, in making things, in drawing things, in role playing games, in physical movement or in songs. An excellent pre-primary classroom would happily mix *playing* and *learning* in a cheerful and supportive atmosphere.

In the continuous quest of which method would be more effective in giving children a stronger motivation, increase their concentration span and maintain their attention focused on a certain type of activity for a longer period, reduce the fatigue level, make them feel more confident, provide them with more stimuli to learn which can also stimulate children's creativity and imagination, we can conclude that the language games method proves to be by far the most recommended, best accepted and desired and the most successful in forming a positive attitude towards in young children language teaching and learning.

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