

How to help your class learn English



by Claire Selby

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Contents

Chapter	Page
Part I Background, research and a new methodology	
Introduction to Part I	5
1. When to start teaching children English	8
2. How children learn language	9
3. How children learn best	17
4. Past methods of teaching English	30
5. The Spiral Language System™	36
6. English in children's education today	62
7. Conclusions	74
Part II Preparation and planning	
Introduction to Part II	75
1. Where to start	76
2. Structure and planning	79
3. Preparing lessons	81
4. Reviewing published courses	84
5. Beginners of different ages	85
6. The Team approach	88
7. Reading and writing in English	91
8. Conclusions	92

Part III Using materials effectively	94
How to choose and use materials	
Introduction to Part III	96
1. Meeting the class	98
2. Classroom management	106
3. Songs	121
4. Stories	134
5. Games	147
6. Activity sheets	150
7. Flashcards	157
8. Wall posters	168
9. Puppets	170
10. Pop-outs	175
11. Props from home	176
12. Craft	177
13. First steps in digital technology	181
14. Occasions and festivals	183
15. Performances	184
16. Rewards	185
17. Conclusion	186
18. References	187
19. Bibliography	190



Definitions:

- Young learners are children in primary education aged between six and ten years.
- Very young learners are classed as pre-primary and are aged from three to five years.
- Infants are children below the age of three years.

Introduction

Whether you are an experienced teacher or a newly qualified teacher of English as a foreign language, the more you know about how children learn language, the better you will be able to help them.

The great news is that this is a good time to take another look at teaching English as a foreign language to children because of improvements in the sources of information we can use.

There are two new sources in particular:

- Neuro-scientific research into how the young brain learns language
- Results from the first ten years of teaching English as a foreign language to young and very young learners.

Scientific research

The results of the last few decades of neuroscience are now able to supply real and useful conclusions about how children learn language. This book will highlight the most significant findings and explain why governments internationally are pressing for children to start learning a second language earlier.

Results

Publishers of school courses made the first tentative steps into teaching English to primary and pre-primary pupils about ten years ago. I also began preparing materials to help children learn English in pre-primary ten years ago in response to demand from parents and schools. Since then, the company I founded, Yellow House Limited, has created materials for pre-schools and primary schools, home learning and teacher training across a number of media around the world.

The results of the experience gained over those ten years provide today's teachers with a whole bank of practical ideas and tried and tested approaches that can make teaching English in primary and pre-primary even more successful.

There is another reason to review how English is taught to young learners. It is clear from the research that children can learn better and faster much earlier in their lives than educationalists first thought. In fact, there is only a short window of opportunity when the time is best for children to start learning their second or third language. Teachers, schools and parents can help if they are aware of this time priority and know how to present language in the best way to harness children's natural abilities at a young age.

There is a new urgency too. English is an educational priority in most countries because it has become the common language across the world for trade and scientific research. It is even the chosen language of communication for ordinary people taking part in international political and social change. They communicate on the internet in English.

Advancing countries are looking for new ways to accelerate learning. The Minister of Education for a national government recently asked me the question, "But how can we help the children in our schools to learn English better and faster?" Research and experience can supply some of the answers.

How to help your class learn English draws on both of these sources to explore new ways for you to help your class learn English more efficiently and effectively.

The book is divided into three parts:

Part I reviews the results of research into how children learn and how they develop their language skills. It highlights how English fits into the primary and pre-primary learning curricula. Finally, it presents an easy methodology to follow that pulls all these strengths together and gives you a clear structure to follow in your teaching.

Part II identifies which activities help children build paths to memory and how these can be applied to create a balanced learning programme.

Part III is a practical guide to choosing and using all the different materials and resources available. It offers a balance between new technology-based, virtual materials and traditional, physical materials.

There is not sufficient room in this publication to cover all the ideas for the learning games and creative play that I would like to include, so please refer to selected examples on the web page www.yellowh.com/guideforteachers.

The same website will offer further information about training and workshops.

