Innovative Practices
in Early English
Language Education

Edited by David Valente · Daniel Xerri

palgrave
macmillan

Language learning as education in the primary English classroom

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Abstract

The chapter argues that primary school language teaching has inherited a methodology and a view of language teaching that is inappropriate for language learning as part of the education. The chapter provides an alternative perspective drawn on social constructivist thinking about the nature of learning, roles of learners and sources of learner engagement. It sets out eight principles for course design in the primary classroom. These include the importance of educationally rich content and methodology, a language syllabus driven by curriculum themes, use of the L1, involvement of children in classroom decision-making, the need for interaction with ideas, a methodology which is inclusive of all, and classroom work which is age appropriate. The chapter concludes with examples how the principles can be applied in practice.

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1 Introduction

There is an old joke, which I have heard many times, in many different countries and cultures, but which always repeats the same established prejudices. In this joke, a member of a deemed socially superior group (such as educated city people) is walking in the countryside and stops a member of a deemed socially inferior group (such as uneducated country dwellers) and asks the best way to get to some far off place. "*Well,*" is the reply, "*if you want to get there, I wouldn't start from here, if I were you!*" The joke plays, of course, upon the assumed dimwittedness of the person replying. Yet, there is a double play here, for in the reply the 'wise fool' has actually pointed out that it is the questioner who is foolish in coming so far away from their chosen destination, and in entirely the wrong direction.

There is something of this in my focus in this chapter, for it rests upon a view that, in language teaching for primary school children (here, meaning those aged 5 -12, in a school setting), we have come so far out of the way in our thinking about an appropriate language curriculum, that we probably cannot get to where we want to go from here. We will have to move to another point of departure and start again. It is this new point of departure which I wish to explore, by setting out some now well-established principles from educational writings, and by applying these to language teaching in the context of primary schools. But before we look at the possible journey ahead, I need to show why I believe "we can't start from here".

2 Current issues and research

2.1 Mainstream approaches in the primary English classroom
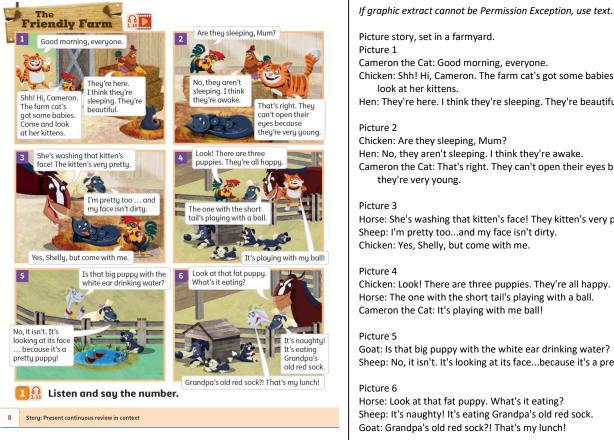
Perhaps one of the most unfortunate aspects of the biography of teaching English in primary schools is that, like a younger sibling, it has frequently received 'hand-me-downs' from its older, more well-established, elders. Historically, modern foreign language teaching was first targeted at adults and then extended into secondary schools. As the account by Howatt and Smith (2014) details, much of the history of British and European language teaching has taken place against the backdrop of an unshaken adherence to grammar as the main organizing principle for the selection

and sequence of content. Initially drawing on the teaching of classical languages, foreign language teachers began by trying "to emulate the classics in the design of their teaching materials: the familiar pattern of grammar rules in the mother-tongue being followed by paradigms and vocabulary lists with an emphasis on exceptions" (Howatt and Smith 2014:80). Subsequent methodological developments, in particular behaviourist approaches (e.g. Fries and Fries, 1961) which emphasised language as habit building, did not depart from grammar as the guiding basis. Interestingly, even the emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1970s/80s, at least in its 'weak' variety, often simply mapped language functions on to a grammar syllabus, preserving the progression familiar to teachers. Later developments, such as Krashen-inspired subconscious acquisition methodologies (e.g Krashen and Terrell, 1983), and task-based methodologies, that also promise subconscious acquisition but through interaction (e.g. Ellis, 2003), have in the main failed to shift mainstream language teaching away from its grammar foundation. The well-established but heavily criticised PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) framework still dominates most language teaching worldwide, as many successive surveys of coursebooks have shown (e.g. Littlejohn, 1992; Tomlinson et al, 2001; Nitta and Gardner, 2005; Masuhara et al, 2008; Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2013). Although PPP has its origins in the early development of CLT (Anderson, 2017), it has freely incorporated much of the behaviourist legacy of language teaching in many of the exercise types for controlled practice, such as drills, listen and repeat, substitution tables, and patterned dialogues.

With this 'hand-me-down' history that mainstream primary school language teaching has inherited, it is not surprising that it continues to reflect the same underlying view as found in approaches for older learners: a conceptualisation of language learning as being mainly about *learning language*. Garton et al (2013:12), in their study of global English language teaching practices, found, for example, that the most common activities in primary school language classrooms included repeating after the teacher, reading out loud, filling gaps, memorising words and grammar exercises. In this, language aims are most usually addressed implicitly through the language to which learners are exposed, although, as Copland et al (2014: 749) remark, it is not uncommon to find teachers speaking about problems in explaining "difficult grammar categories". This emphasis on *learning language* is most clearly evident in the divide that usually exists between learning content (that is, aspects of the language) and carrier content (that is, content used to exemplify and 'carry' the learning content, such as fictional dialogues) (Littlejohn, 2015a; Littlejohn 1997). The carrier may be chosen for a variety of reasons, such as its interest or entertainment value, in addition

to how well it carries the language goal, but the assumption is that learners will probably forget the carrier, while hopefully retaining the language learning content.

Whilst the underlying learning content – the language syllabus - has remained largely unchanged in its transfer from older to younger learners, there is now, however, a clear recognition of the need for child-friendly topics and child-friendly classroom activities, such as games, songs and craft activities in the carrier. Figure 1 shows an example of this, from a picture story in a recent coursebook produced by a mainstream UK publisher. Here we can see how the text has been created to exemplify the chosen learning content (the Present continuous), with the carrier content pitched to appeal to the primary school learner through the focus on talking farmyard animals, babies and kittens, and a humorous ending.

If graphic extract cannot be Permission Exception, use text.

Picture story, set in a farmyard.
Picture 1
Cameron the Cat: Good morning, everyone.
Chicken: Shh! Hi, Cameron. The farm cat's got some babies. Come and look at her kittens.
Hen: They're here. I think they're sleeping. They're beautiful.

Picture 2
Chicken: Are they sleeping, Mum?
Hen: No, they aren't sleeping. I think they're awake.
Cameron the Cat: That's right. They can't open their eyes because they're very young.

Picture 3
Horse: She's washing that kitten's face! They kitten's very pretty.
Sheep: I'm pretty too...and my face isn't dirty.
Chicken: Yes, Shelly, but come with me.

Picture 4
Chicken: Look! There are three puppies. They're all happy.
Horse: The one with the short tail's playing with a ball.
Cameron the Cat: It's playing with me ball!

Picture 5
Goat: Is that big puppy with the white ear drinking water?
Sheep: No, it isn't. It's looking at its face...because it's a pretty puppy!

Picture 6
Horse: Look at that fat puppy. What's it eating?
Sheep: It's naughty! It's eating Grandpa's old red sock.
Goat: Grandpa's old red sock?! That's my lunch!

Figure 1: Extract from Nixon and Tomlinson (2017: 8)

Perhaps an older learner, with of course different carrier content, could see how the various sentences in the extract are designed to exemplify the Present continuous (as the caption beneath the

story explains) and see the pedagogic purpose of the strange exchanges, but there is not much distance here between unnatural sentences like *Is that big puppy with the white ear drinking water?* or the reply *No, it isn't. It's looking at its face…because it's a pretty puppy!* and the infamous '*la plume de ma tante est sur la table'* type sentences from the grammar-translation books of old. In fairness to the authors, the pressures on coursebook writers to produce texts like these are considerable. As myself an experienced writer of materials for primary schools, I know that the requirement to write in conformity with a linguistic syllabus and external examinations is often overwhelming and probably leads to reproducing the PPP format to ensure coverage of the required content.

I do not wish to debate the pros and cons of a PPP approach here, but merely note that research and theories of education tell us that all but those learners in the final years of primary education are simply unlikely to acquire language in an externally planned manner. For young learners, the acquisition of an L2 is likely to require the same conditions as L1 acquisition, a process which is largely subconscious, and which is based on interaction around messages and meaning (Dekeyser, 2003; Dekeyser et al, 2010; Ellis, 2009). The basis on which much primary school language teaching is conceived is intended for another kind of learner, an older one, who can see language as an object to be learned, who understands what 'practice' is and what it is for. Given this, it is not surprising that current mainstream approaches to English language teaching in primary schools often produce disappointing results, with low achievement rates in many places in the world, and with few school systems actually able to achieve their intended standards (see, for example, Barahona, 2016; Ko, 2006; Erkan, 20015; Hayes, 2014). Where there are better rates of success this is often coupled with other factors such as the parents' English language abilities and higher socio-economic status, and English being widespread in the local community, suggesting that provision in the school is otherwise not achieving its purpose. Not only does this lead us to seriously question the drive to an early start in English with current approaches, but a methodology which seeks to maintain fun as a means of carrying a language syllabus can create significant difficulties and disappointed expectations when children transition to secondary education.

There is, however, a further problem here. Approaches which prioritise language itself have placed language teaching on the margins of educational thinking, drawing on a literature almost exclusively concerned with language analysis and language teaching methods, coupled, perhaps, with practical knowledge of what appears 'to work' with young learners. Although there are some

notable exceptions (e.g. Moon, 2005), a glance at some of the many texts for training teachers to teach children confirms this through their typical chapter divisions which show how language teaching is conceived of as teaching grammar, vocabulary, and each of the 'four skills' of reading, writing, speaking and listening, with additional sections on such topics as classroom management, lesson planning and so on (e.g. Linse, 2005; Nunan, 2011; Shin and Crandall, 2014; and the Cambridge *CELT-P* course). Such an approach omits the fact that, for young learners, language learning is part of their developing experience, and actually takes place in the context of their education, and probably in an institution which has education in the broadest sense as its overarching remit. We need to think not only about language development but also about how the actual process of teaching and learning - our methodology – contributes to the educational experience of children. A focus on *learning language*, coupled with a good dose of fun activities, seems unlikely to offer that. In other words, if we want to position language learning as a contributor to educational growth, we can't start from here. We will need to move to a different place.

2.2 Learning as a social experience

The starting point that I wish to offer here is one which derives from a perspective on teaching at the centre of debate in current educational thinking. Loosely known as social constructivism, this shifts the emphasis away from the content being taught and more towards the nature of the social experience of learning. It offers a refreshing, alternative view which has significant implications for primary English language teaching, as I will show. To do so, however, I first need to set out some key features of a social constructivist perspective on the nature of knowledge and learning, sources of engagement and motivation, and the role of learners in their learning.

From a social constructivist point of view, knowledge is never something that is simply delivered to a learner, but something which is *constructed* and *co-constructed* in interaction with others, inside the learner's own head (Vygotsky, 1962). Fundamental to this view is the idea that learning is always an act of negotiation between what the learner already knows and what is new to the learner, such that new knowledge and experiences can only make sense if they are related to previous knowledge and experiences. The starting point for learning is always this negotiation inside the learner's head, even if the teacher endeavours to adopt a transmission approach in teaching. From a constructivist point of view, therefore, the key to effective teaching is to enable and support this negotiation between known and new by enabling it to happen explicitly, through guiding

experiences and discussion (Bruner, 1978; Mercer and Littleton, 2007). The learners' role is thus not one of simply receiving teacher delivered content, but one of interacting with ideas. Interaction in this view refers a deeper level of engagement than learners simply working together in pairs or groups. In the primary school classroom, some writers advocate dialogic teaching as an approach to bring about this deeper level of engagement (Alexander, 2008; Alexander, 2020). Dialogic teaching aims to engage learners in exploratory talk in which the teacher asks learners to share their thinking, compare with what others have said, and verbalise things that are unclear to them, not as a means to test their knowledge, but as a means to support them in relating new ideas to what they already know. The classroom is thus seen as a community, and as a highly interactive space, in which ideas are explored and generated. Learners are seen, not as consumers of knowledge and ideas, delivered by the teacher, but as producers.

This social, contextual view of the classroom also extends to sources of learners' motivation in learning. Traditionally, teachers have emphasised instrumental motivations, such as getting a job. Such a view is unlikely to have much relevance to primary school children who are naturally more concerned with the 'here and now' of the classroom, rather than the 'there and then' of some future situation. Perhaps recognising this, primary school teachers frequently place great store on providing extrinsic motivation, through such things as gold stars for good work, and on intrinsic motivation, through such things as the already mentioned 'fun' activities. A significant problem with extrinsic sources of motivation, however, is that rewards only work if learners believe there is a strong likelihood that they will get them. If a learner's work consistently does not merit a gold star, then they are unlikely to continue struggling to get one. Similarly, attempts at stimulating intrinsic motivation through fun classroom activities may only have limited success. The effect is usually only temporary, offering no sustainable engagement or interest once the fun is over and normal work resumes.

In contrast to distanced and temporary sources of motivation and engagement, a social constructivist perspective instead emphasises the importance of the immediate context and, in particular, the classroom roles which are implied by the structure of teaching and learning. A number of factors have been identified in this, including the locus of control (Hsieh, 2012), a sense of value and purpose (Williams, 1998), and self-esteem and feelings of success (Ushioda, 2012),. Locus of control relates to the idea that where learners feel they have more control over what they are doing, they are more likely to feel engaged (Hsieh, 2012). A sense of value and purpose in what

they are learning is seen as vital to sustained engagement because, without that, mere surface compliance is likely to result, in which the learner simply ensures that they are seen to do the work required, rather than actually engage with in. The concepts of self-esteem and of feelings of success in learning are extremely important for primary school children in particular. Much of what happens in classrooms can be explained by reference to a human desire to save face and to avoid feelings of failure. It is this desire that may explain why some children consistently choose to sit at the back of the classroom, where they think they may not be noticed or adopt a 'not interested' attitude as a way of distancing the impact of failure. This perspective on motivation thus emphasises the importance, once again, of viewing the classroom as a community in which feelings of success must be created, and in which inclusion of all is actively pursued.

Viewed through a social constructivist perspective, the work of the teacher is thus very different from how it has been traditionally seen in language teaching, and implies very different classroom roles for all concerned. I have already referred to a shift from a role of the learner as a consumer of presented knowledge and ideas towards a role as producer. At stake here is an answer to a fundamental question: what kind of learner do we want to emerge from primary school learning? A strong, defined answer to this question has been offered by the designers of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP).

> The PYP curriculum framework begins with the premise that PYP students are agents of their own learning and partners in the learning process.
> The PYP curriculum recognizes learners' innate potential to inquire, question, wonder and theorize about themselves, others, and the world around them.
> When learning communities recognize children's emergent identities and competencies, they create an educational context that values children both for who they were, who they are in the present and who they will become in the future. In building from prior learning and experiences, PYP learners are uniquely placed to co-create their current learning needs.
> (International Baccalaureate Organisation website)

It is not difficult to see the influence of social constructivist thinking here, with the recognition that PYP learners are 'agents of their own learning and partners in the learning process' and that they can 'co-create their current learning needs'. Here, the learner is viewed as someone who can 'inquire, question, wonder and theorize' about the world and take action. The significance of images of self-esteem and self-confidence are also strongly reflected here, with the concern for 'children's emergent identities and competencies' and the implication this may have for their personal future. There is much in this statement which may cause all primary school teachers to

pause and consider how far these aspects are reflected in their own classrooms. For language teachers, in particular, concerned with covering a pre-planned language syllabus, there is also much which will present a major challenge. This statement stands in stark contrast to a transmission view of language teaching. It also stands in stark contrast with language teaching methodologies which emphasise learners' passive, subconscious absorption of language whilst engaged in fun activities or other tasks. We are therefore left with a powerful question: how can primary school English teachers meet the wider educational aims, such as those set out in the IBO PYP, and realise the significance of a social constructivist perspective, whilst still meeting the language teaching objectives placed upon them?

3 Practical applications: social constructivism and the primary English classroom

There are clearly many different possible implications if we take a social constructivist, educational perspective on English language teaching. This takes us right back to the age old discussion about ends and means: what are the most effective classroom means to achieve the hoped for ends? Mainstream language teaching has offered a reply to this question which emphasises means to achieve specified learning goals through a palette of exercise types such as drills, comprehension work, oral practice, games and so on. A widened set of objectives, however, will require a much broader range of methodological choices to supplement the existing repertoire. In this last section of the chapter, therefore, I want to set out some principles for course design, derived from my own experience with primary school teachers and children and with materials development, and inspired by my understanding of what constructivist approaches to primary English teaching can look like. Some of these principles will chime with recent developments in the language teaching literature, but my aim here is to offer them as a coherent educationally motivated framework. With these principles in mind, I will then offer some practical examples of classroom work.

3.1 Principles for course design

Principle 1: Classroom content has educational value

Earlier in this chapter, I made a distinction between learning content (such as vocabulary items or grammar) and carrier content (such as the farmyard dialogue in the example extract) which is used to 'carry' the learning content. A social constructivist perspective emphasises the importance of a sense of value and purpose in all aspects of language learning. Whilst fun fictional texts, games and songs may have a temporary motivating force in getting primary school learners' attention, for sustained motivation we need content that is seen by the children as having significance and which

provides educational value. We need, therefore, to choose content that is not only interesting, but which has learning value in itself, beyond simply the language it exemplifies. In the context of the primary school, the most obvious, natural and justifiable source of content is the primary school curriculum, and the topics and themes which it covers. In this case, the notion of disposable carrier content thus becomes redundant.

Principle 2: Classroom activities have educational value
Principle 2 extends the need for educational value to classroom methodology. This means that the way that learners work with content should have benefit in relation to wider educational objectives. For example, tasks and activities should have value in developing cognitive abilities (such as requiring learners to analyse, hypothesise, and so on) or social skills such as working effectively with others, providing guidance to peers, and so on. The conventional stock of language teaching task types, such as listen and repeat, read and answer, complete the sentence, and so on, may have little value in this respect, emphasising as they do 'lower order thinking skills' of recall, semantic understanding, and application of rules, in Bloom's well-known taxonomy (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001).

Principle 3: Meaning and content are the central focus of classroom work
A shift away from a language syllabus as the driver of classroom work, towards the content and methodology of the full curriculum, as mentioned in Principle 1 and 2, will necessarily imply an emphasis on the meaning of language. The learning of form is however important and should not be ignored, as later stages in schooling (and life) are likely to require accuracy. Form, however, needs to be the servant of meaning so that language is taught as it is required by the theme or topic, not because it exists as the next item in a language syllabus. Earlier, I mentioned the distinction between ends and means. In primary school English language learning, the end needs to be the ability to use language to express and understand ideas, particularly those derived from the curriculum. Language form is thus best viewed as means towards achieving that end, not as an end in itself. This gains added weight when we consider the evidence from child language studies, mentioned earlier, which shows how children acquire language through meaning, and not in any externally determined sequence. As Cameron (2001: 82) argues this underlines the importance of a thematic organisation for course design in the primary English classroom, which will provide opportunities for "realistic and motivating uses of the language with meaning and purpose".

Principle 4: The L1 is a resource for learning

Social constructivist perspectives emphasise that learning is always an act of negotiation between what the learner already knows and what is new. In the context of primary school language learning, this suggests that the learner's L1 (here and elsewhere, taken to also refer to the predominant language of instruction) should be actively involved in the English language classroom, in a planned and strategic way. For beginning level learners, for example, this may mean that they are encouraged to share ideas first in the L1 and then helped to express those ideas in English. It also suggests that when they meet new or unfamiliar language, they are asked to to compare with their own language. Translation, in this case, becomes an active feature of the classroom, but always as a means of supporting learners in expressing their ideas in English.

Principle 5: Learners are involved in classroom decision-making

The idea of learners as "partners in the learning process" mentioned in the PYP description earlier, suggests an active role for learners in making decisions in the classroom and a shift in the locus of control away from the teacher. In practical terms, this could involve learners in selecting topics to focus on, the selection, design and sequencing of activities, and the creation of assessment tasks, depending on the possibilities offered by their level of maturity. As the PYP statement suggests, sharing classroom decisions with learners implies a role as co-creators of their learning. An excellent example of this in action has been provided by Nikolov (2000), who provides a rich illustration of many years of experience of sharing classroom decisions with primary school children.

Principle 6: Classroom work is highly interactive

To a great extent, Principle 6 will naturally result from an application of Principles 1-5, to produce a highly interactive classroom. The principle is worth stating in its own right, however, as it sets down a need to ensure that learners are engaged in interacting not only with each other in pairs and groups but with ideas, in an exploratory manner, whether they originate from other learners, the teacher or from texts and media. The interactive classroom according to this perspective is one in which learners are engaged with ideas, and where they "inquire, question, wonder and theorize", to quote once again the IBO PYP statement.

Principle 7: Classroom work is inclusive

The term 'inclusive' means that participation and a sense of success and achievement should be available to all. The value of this lies not only, as explained earlier, in relation to the psychology of motivation in which feelings of success are themselves motivating, but also in relation to the development of feelings of self-esteem and competence so vital to a child's personal development. A key concept in this is the notion of differentiation. Often, this is interpreted as the design of tasks for supposed different levels of ability, which are allocated to different groups of learners. Such approaches, however, run the risk of being self-fulfilling prophecies as learners come to see themselves as 'weak', 'average' or 'high-achievers', and therefore adjust their aspirations and effort accordingly. The concept of inclusiveness, in contrast, suggests that it is not tasks which should be differentiated, but rather the level of support. Support needs to be made available to all learners simultaneously, for them to utilise as they need, guided by the teachers encouragement to first simply try. For example, the provision of bilingual word lists, translation of the main ideas in a reading text into the L1, sentence starters, answer keys, and so on, can be made available to everyone, so that all learners are working on the same task and towards the same goal, drawing on different amounts of support as needed.

Principle 8: Classroom work is age appropriate

Principle 8 can be interpreted as introducing a word of caution in the application of Principles 1-7. It is important that any movement towards, for example, shared decision-making or learner designed activities is appropriate to the children's cognitive and social development. I have already remarked, for example, that language work which requires learners to work with explicitly stated rules of grammar are likely to be inappropriate to all but the oldest learners in the primary school age range. We can expect similar limitations in social abilities, such as how well they can work in a team, cooperate with others, give guidance and feedback to peers, participate in public, etc. Nikolov (op. cit.) records some interesting examples of this and how gender and maturity appear to come into play as learners grow older.

3.2 Examples of principles in practice

In this section I will set out some examples of how I see the eight principles can be collectively reflected in classroom work. Two examples relate to the overall organisation of teaching and learning, while two further examples describe specific task types. Further examples of educational

approaches to classroom work at primary school level are available in Littlejohn (2015a, 2015b 2016a, 2016b).

Example 1: Content and methods from across the curriculum, integrating the L1

As a direct alternative to content which only serves as a carrier for language goals, Littlejohn and Schofield (2005) shows how topics can be taken from the existing primary school curriculum, and integrated into the teaching of English, such that first language and English language abilities are addressed simultaneously with wider educational goals. The approach taken is in contrast to established versions of Content and Language Integrated Learning (e.g. Marsh, 2XXX) in that a topic (such as Plants, Food, Animals, and so on) may be first explored by the class in the L1, then expanded in the English language classes, before it is returned to once again in the L1. In this case, knowledge of a topic gained in the L1 can support understanding in English, and knowledge gained in the English stage can support further topic development when it returns to the L1 stage. This weaving in and out of languages whilst simultaneously addressing the educational objectives of the curriculum shows how at each stage the learners' prior knowledge and experience becomes the basis for subsequent stages, reflecting many of principles for course design set out above.

Example 2: Learner plans

Some years ago, I had the pleasure of witnessing a highly inventive teacher working with a class of children aged around 7-8. Speaking predominantly in English, but glossing in the L1, the teacher was leading the children through the curriculum topic of 'Towns'. In the class I witnessed, she showed the children four shopping bags from local supermarkets, and presented them with a challenge: how can we find out which supermarket has the best bags? In groups, the children then worked on developing a plan, first by deciding what 'best' meant (price? strength? design? reusablility?) and then how they could collect data (ask people's opinions? do tests on strength, getting wet and so on?). As the children shared ideas, the teacher circulated to help them write about their plans in simple English, and then produce a timetable for each step in their research. The resulting feelings of ownership for their project and the opportunities for decision-making provided a strong motivator for engagement.

Similar opportunities for deeper levels of engagement also exist when children are given the responsibility for setting out plans for their learning, how they will use classroom time, and how they will record their progress in relation to the chosen theme. If the teacher offers careful support

by supplying ideas or suggestions, and by asking children to reflect on whether they have used their time effectively, approaches such as these can change in the structure of teaching and learning, and move the locus of control from the teacher towards the children.

Example 3: Question posters

While Examples 1 and 2 provide an illustration of a broad approach to course design, question posters offer a concrete example of how this can be implemented in the classroom. In simple terms the procedure is as follows. The teacher (or indeed the class) proposes a topic, such as 'animals in the jungle'. The teacher then writes this topic inside a large circle on a poster paper and asks the class what they would like to know or find out. Initially, children usually volunteer questions in the L1, which the teacher then recasts into English, and writes on the question poster. As more and more related questions come up, the teacher encourages the children to try to formulate their questions in English themselves, but provides help as needed so that everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to add a question to the poster. Once sufficient questions have been generated, the teacher then sets the children the goal of finding answers to their questions by looking in books, on the internet, asking other teachers, parents, and friends over the coming days or weeks. As the children return with answers, the teacher helps them write their answer in English, and sticks it on the poster, with their name on it.

It is not difficult to see how a task type like this bridges many of the principles set out earlier. The task is inclusive as all may participate, regardless of their level of ability. It starts from the learners' previous knowledge not only in relation to the topic but also in the way in which it moves from the L1 to English. It reveals rich educational content and engages the children in the development of many skills, such as researching, explaining succinctly, and approaching others. The task has value and purpose beyond simply language learning goals.

Example 4: Cognitive engagement in language work

Where classroom work needs to focus directly on English itself, educational aims related to cognitive development can be integrated into language work, as part of the overall topic or theme. For example, children can be asked to think like scientists and use Venn diagrams to create their own classification of items (for example, different types of flowers) or to make a weather forecast, based on pictures and data about meteorological phenomena. They can be asked to think like historians and make deductions about how people lived in the past, based on pictures of discovered

artefacts. Before reading a text, they can be asked to formulate their own questions which they can see if the text answers. Each of these examples requires a language-rich solution, not simply a one-word answer, and provides opportunities for negotiation of ideas with the class as a whole.

4 Conclusion

There will be little doubt that application of the principles set out in this chapter pose significant challenges. The realities of primary school classrooms around the world are daunting. In many places, primary school teachers are now being required to teach the curriculum in English, when they themselves have an uncertain command of the language. In other places, English teachers with little or no experience of the primary school curriculum are being required to teach young children. Yet, it is also important to recognise that the teaching of English in primary schools is literally in its infancy and, as a profession, we are still at the stage of determining its most appropriate nature. This will necessarily involve us in drawing on ideas from the field of education as a whole, and not, as the wise fool suggests, to start from where we currently are in language teaching for older learners.

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