

INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The significance of facilitating the learning and taking into account the way they learn by people involved in the teaching-learning process and implementing it into the teaching practices for young learners is discussed in the article.

KEYWORDS: young learners, scaffolding, stage, procedure, skills.

INTRODUCTION

As English has become the dominant language in the world, it has also become one of the components of tertiary, secondary, primary and even pre-school education in the EFL teaching contexts. It brings a demand for competent English language teachers to teach young language learners.

Age plays a crucial role in what we teach and how we teach it, since a young learner class is different from an adult and/or a teenager class in terms of the learners' language learning needs, the language competences emphasized, and the cognitive skills addressed.

Teaching English for young learners, therefore, should be properly handled if it is to be successful. It needs highly skilled and dedicated teaching. Teachers of English for young learners need to have a sound understanding of how students think and operate, that is how young learners learn a language.

Young learners will learn best if the people involved in the teaching-learning process facilitate the learning and take into account the way they learn into the teaching practices. Piaget suggested that children developed through specific stages, they are:

1. Sensori-Motor Stage (from 0–2 years) in which children seemed to learn through physical interaction with the world around them.
2. Pre-operational stage (from 2–7 years) when children need concrete situations to process ideas.
3. Concrete Operational Stage (from 7–11 years) in which children begin to conceptualize and do some abstract problem solving, though they still learn best by doing.
4. Formal Operational Stage (from 1–15) in which children are able to use abstract thinking.

Young learners can be included into those aged 7–11 years or within concrete operational stage, where they learn best from concrete things around them. Piaget believed that children went through the stages above and that they could only move onto the next stage when they had completed the stage before and were ready to do so.

Another expert, Vygotsky believed that language was central to the cognitive development of children, that it was instruction provided by an adult that helped children learn and develop.

The distinction between Piaget's and Vygotsky's views was that while Piaget suggested that children work through different stages of learning on their own, Vygotsky (1978) maintained that there is a difference between what children could achieve (and how they could develop) on their own and what children could achieve (and how they could develop) when an adult was able to work with them which was described as the zone of proximal development.

The support given by adults was described as scaffolding by Bruner (1983). With scaffolding children develop and grow because the adults give support to their thinking and learning process. The term scaffolding is widely used in English language teaching when teachers provide support in the learning process to facilitate the learning either by providing the vocabulary or asking some guiding questions.

Donaldson believed that children were able to cognitively develop by trying to make sense of the experiences that they had, and by asking questions and trying things out, or hypothesizing.

How do children learn language? Children all over the world acquire their native language without formal training and there are some theories regarding the language acquisition process. Chomsky believed that learning was innate, in the sense that every child has an innate capability to learn a language.

This idea of Chomsky's was followed by the term Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggested by Eric Lenneberg who thought that there was a critical period, up to about the age of eleven, in which children were able to learn language.

For the successful teaching of English in primary schools, above all, it is essential for the teacher to understand the young learners' characteristics, instincts, and interests in their cognitive, linguistic, and emotional aspects, because this will play a crucial role in how the teacher builds a lesson, how he or she can make sure that the young learners are fully involved in the learning process, how he or she achieves the objectives of a lesson, and how they respond. In this respect, these lines, in the first place, get the English teacher not only to understand general characteristics of the young learners, but also to recognize the qualifications as a primary English teacher. Secondly, the goals, the contents, and the syllabuses of primary English teaching are roughly discussed in terms of the English curriculum in primary schools. And finally, as the main topic of this article, how to build a lesson for primary English teaching is more specifically discussed, in terms of teaching procedures including its key stages and their sub stages, the learners' interactions and activities at each stage, and teaching skills and techniques at each sub stage, and so on.

They have short attention span. So teachers should vary their techniques to break the boredom. they should give varied activities as handwriting, songs, games etc. They are very active. Try to ask them to play games, role play dialogues and involve them in competitions. They are less shy than older learners. Ask them to repeat utterances, resort to mechanical drills.

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