

The Early Learning EFL Classroom

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In recent years and in many parts of the world, the foreign language teacher at school is increasingly being required to specialise in EFL for younger and younger learners. Very often, this means exploring “unknown territory”, where the FL teacher is finding their own way whilst at the same time leading and guiding their group of young pupils through their initial learning.

This article is aimed at those EFL teachers who are just moving into the area of Early Learning (from 3 to 6 years old) as well as Early Learning practitioners who are starting out in EFL. For this purpose, we have combined the knowledge and experience of an EFL teacher specialising in Young Learners with that of an Early Learning practitioner and psychologist to gain a more global picture of EFL and the role of the EFL teacher in the Early-Learning setting.

We hope that the information and advice offered here, although essentially basic and simplified, will help to make this “unknown territory” more familiar, easier to negotiate and less threatening.

The Early-Learning Teacher’s Tools

If children are to pick up English in a “natural way”, their early classroom experience should be essentially in English and language should ideally be “acquired” in a similar way to the bilingual child with the teacher taking a similar role to the bilingual parent.

This means learning the foreign language through the learning process itself in a communicative way.

At this stage, children are learning:

- to communicate*
- to learn*
- to live with others in harmony*
- to interact confidently*
- to know about the world and life*
- to respond to stimuli*
- to control their responses*
- to use their different forms of intelligence creatively*
- to love, to play and to work together in harmony*

All these concepts and more are part of the child’s learning experience and should also be part of the bilingual classroom. The foreign language “class” is an extension of the general early-learning setting, which can be achieved if the teacher has a reasonable command of a range of “linguistic tools”. For example:

- *A repertoire of nursery songs, rhymes and stories*
- *Some knowledge of children’s games and activities*
- *Some knowledge of children’s VIPs*
- *“Teacherese” (typical teacher-pupil language routines)*
- *Instructions for setting up activities and games*
- *A repertoire of “running commentary”*
- *This means the kind of language that can be used to lead the class in general and not specifically for activities, i.e. for filling time when children are carrying out an activity that is not necessarily oral or for “real-life” interaction. Exclamations, comments, expressions of approval or disapproval, question tag statements, talking about the weather, etc., are all kinds of running commentary.*
- *Some knowledge of how children acquire language*

To the above can be added some general “early-learning” tools to help the FL teacher to enable children to learn their second language through learning itself and through play, in what we could call a Young Learner Friendly environment. For example:

- *The experience of infant teacher colleagues*
- *Access to the early-learning classroom, materials and equipment:*
 - *toys, posters, pictures, books, P.E. and play apparatus, art materials, etc.*
- *Knowledge of the early-learning curriculum in general and of associated activities:*
 - *activities which link language with physical movement include action songs, rhymes and story-telling, role play and practical experiences, like cookery, games, drama, sport and excursions.*
 - *activities which encourage “receptive” language acquisition include listening/drawing, listening/creating, reading, writing, and “total immersion”, i.e. their surroundings offer the opportunity to look at, hear and learn about printed language (posters, pictures, books, labels and classroom areas for the exclusive use of English), music and general conversation.*

Finally, in the same way as the mother/father/grandparent figures form the focal point of the child’s out-of-school environment, the teacher(s) plays a similar role at school and is thus in an ideal position to foster the learning process. Your attitude and performance in the classroom can make or break! Learning can be aided by the following Young Learner Friendly skills:

- *Enable children to feel confident, loved and safe*
- *Respect each child’s rate of learning, including silence*
- *Avoid pressure, hurry and stress*
- *Make language easy*
 - *speak slowly and clearly, separate thought groups clearly, use intonation and stressing, use plenty of repetition, gestures, body-language, sensorial aids, demonstration of what you mean, etc.*
- *Use “invisible” error correction*
 - *answering for the child, repeating, rephrasing, etc.*
- *Provide “comprehensible” input*
 - *with a suitable ratio of known or familiar words, inferable words and new words.*
- *Use language for authentic and interesting purposes*
 - *to communicate with a “foreign” teddy, teacher, other children, to play, to solve problems, to talk about their world, etc.*

All are essential if the child’s experience of English is to be enjoyable, participative and productive. At the same time, these can help the teacher to keep the class mainly in English, to use correct pronunciation and intonation and to give the children basic building blocks of language with which to communicate.

The **KEY** to early FL learning is:

Knowledge:

of language and linguistic culture – songs, rhymes, games, routines, social skills, etc – of how children acquire language and of the general curriculum in all areas;

Experience and Enthusiasm:

of early-learning in general; your own, your colleagues’ and your pupils’; and a

Young Learner Friendly Environment:

both physical – classroom and equipment – and affective – a teacher who brings confidence, affection, security, interest and enjoyment to learning and who respects each child’s learning process and rhythm.

Early Learning Language Acquisition

The following points are characteristic of how small children learn language.

| <i>Learning Feature</i> | <i>Implication</i> |
|---|---|
| <i>Assimilation and reception</i> | young children understand much more than they say |
| <i>Language blocks</i> | young children learn "chunks" of language not elements |
| <i>Silence</i> | young children go through silent periods |
| <i>Concepts</i> | young children learn concepts not word translations |
| <i>Semantic fields</i> | young children learn through topics (e.g. the weather, the seaside, my house, etc.) |
| <i>Intonation and pronunciation</i> | young children enjoy the sound of language |
| <i>Repetition</i> | young children enjoy hearing the same language young children enjoy copying the same language young children need to hear familiar language |
| <i>Alliteration</i> | young children enjoy playing with sound |
| <i>Song and rhyme</i> | young children need these for intonation |
| <i>Sensorial association</i> | young children learn through using their senses |
| <i>Total Physical Response (TPR)</i> | young children learn through movement-concept association |
| <i>Play</i> | young children practise life through play |
| <i>Motivation</i> | young children use language to achieve a purpose |
| <i>VIP dependence</i> | young children need affection and confidence very important people in their lives are family members, special toys like Teddy and you, their teacher. |

Some reflections on language-learning

(taken from Communication, language and literacy, produced by QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK)

- "Learning to listen and speak emerges out of non-verbal communication which includes body language, such as facial expression, eye contact, bending the head to listen, hand gesture and taking turns".
- "All learning arises from physical action and the gathering of experience through the senses".
- "Initially their [children's] attempts to communicate will be non-verbal".

What to expect and when

Remember: Do not demand of the "second language" child a response that would not be expected from a "mother tongue" child of a similar age.

The following stages have been adapted and abridged from "Communication, language and literacy", (QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK). These are developmental features that have been observed to be usual at any moment during each stage but are not necessarily either sequential or compulsory. Children may miss out a stage or features, revisit or jump from one directly to another without passing through an intervening stage or features. However, it is a useful guide of what to expect.

Stage 1 - Around three years old (i.e. between 2¹/₂-3¹/₂, depending on the individual¹).

The child:

- Will use isolated, familiar words especially those connected with people or objects which are important to them, e.g. *hello, my pencil, my mum* and/or gestures, eye contact and facial expression to communicate.
- Will join in with repeated refrains, e.g. *Run, run as fast as you can...; Someone's been eating my soup; Hello, Mrs. Dog, how are you today?*, etc.
- Will respond to simple instructions, e.g. *come in, sit down*, etc.
- Will listen when in small groups or one to one.
- Will use actions/limited words related to "now" and will accept running commentary from the teacher and understand some words used.
- Will be able to identify different sounds and enjoy rhythmic activities, such as alliterative jingles e.g. *bees buzz, five fat frogs, two tiny teddies* or animal and street sounds, etc.
- Will be able to listen to stories and join in with isolated words, in small groups.
- Will be able to draw, paint and participate in hand/eye co-ordination activities, such as cutting with scissors, cooking, pouring, etc.

Stage 2 - Around four years old (3¹/₂-4¹/₂)

The child:

- Will use simple statements e.g. *Child: "Man in car" Teacher: "Yes, that's right, the man is in the car. Very good, Pablo. The man is in the car and he's driving"* and questions in affirmative form with rising intonation e.g. *Child: "Man in car?" Teacher: "Yes, that's right, Mary, the man is in the car. What's he doing? Is he driving? Yes, he's driving a car"* or *Child: "Table red?" Teacher: "Yes, it is. It's red. The table's red"* etc.
- Will often link speech to gestures.
- Will use intonation, rhythm and phrasing (word groups) to make meaning clear.
- Will listen to stories with attention and take part in describing the main settings, characters and events.
- Will recognise rhyme, alliteration and rhythm in the spoken word.
- Will understand that words can be represented in print and begin to shape and recognise letters.
- Will begin to use "possession" language, e.g. *my doll, Pablo's car*, and "receptive" vocabulary, i.e. words learnt previously but not yet spoken aloud by the child.

Stage 3 - Around five years old (4¹/₂-5¹/₂)

The child:

- Will begin to have enough self-confidence to speak to others.

- Will use simple grammatical structures, e.g. *I've got a dog, the table's red.*
- Will begin to ask simple questions, usually with *where/what*, e.g. *What's your name? What colour's this? Where's my book?*, etc.
- Will talk in English in a group, but at the same time as other children rather than interacting.
- Will use language to gain attention but actions to demonstrate or explain.
- Will listen and note other children's answers and negotiate, e.g. *Can I? Will you? I think...*, etc.
- Will extend vocabulary for grouping, sorting and sequence, e.g. *first, last, next, before, after, all, most, some, each, every*, etc.
- Begin to give explanations, e.g. *because, too, very*, etc.

Stage 4 - Around six years old (5¹/₂-6¹/₂)

The child:

- Will begin to use more complex time concepts to talk about *yesterday, today* and *tomorrow*.
- Will negotiate and interact with the teacher and classmates.
- Will take turns.
- Will enjoy spoken and written language and will respond to stories, songs, rhymes, jingles, chants, etc.
- Will begin to relate the spoken word to the written word.
- Will begin to use more complex constructions in statements and questions.
- Will speak more clearly and audibly and use conventions such as *hello, bye, please, thank you*, etc.
- Will give explanations, draw conclusions and make predictions.
- Will name and sound the letters of the alphabet, identify initial and final sounds in words and write simple words.
- Will read familiar words and simple sentences.
- Answer questions of *Where, Who, Whose, Why* and *How*, e.g. Teacher: "Where's the duck?" Child: "in the pond", Teacher: "Who's this?" Boy/girl: "He's Aladdin, She's Jasmine", etc.

At around seven years old, children begin to show systemic awareness, begin to break down block language into separate constituents and begin to show a desire to understand exact equivalents in their mother tongue. Some structures are still used as blocks but language starts to be adapted for specific purposes. Whilst Total Physical Response, songs, stories and rhymes are still important, language is gradually used for more inter-communicative purposes such as problem-solving, elementary project work, tasks, etc.

By around 11 years old, children are using language to acquire the language itself as well as cross-curricular knowledge. Systemic awareness is strong and information gap, task solving, creative activities and project work are now important parts of the FL learning process.

Ten hints for keeping the class in English.

It's amazing how much time you can spend speaking in English if you try and that's just what your children need! Here are ten ideas to help you.

1. Know what specific topic you are going to do each day and prepare the language for it.

The following are typical topics for early learners:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) The weather | 5) The family |
| 2) Parts of the body | 6) The environment (city and country, local area, etc) |
| 3) Action and movement | 7) Colours |
| 4) Clothes | |

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>8) Places to visit (farm, zoo, seaside, school, fire station, shops, park, etc.)</p> <p>9) Counting</p> <p>10) Animals and animal noises</p> <p>11) People and professions</p> <p>12) Magical characters (witch, Goldilocks, princess, etc.)</p> <p>13) Food and drink</p> <p>14) Adjectives (size, shape, appearance)</p> <p>15) Music and instruments</p> <p>16) Games and toys</p> <p>17) Location (prepositions, here/there, etc.)</p> | <p>18) Special occasions (Christmas, Easter, Birthday, etc)</p> <p>19) The house (building, rooms, furniture, crockery and cutlery, surroundings, etc.)</p> <p>20) The natural world (sun, moon, stars, sky, rainbow, ground, tree, flower, etc.)</p> <p>21) The passage of time and change (seasons, times, days, months, ancestors, holidays, growing up, etc.)</p> <p>22) Personal identification (girl/boy, you/I, you/me, your/my, this/that, a/the, names, introductions, etc.)</p> |
|---|---|

2. Keep "routine times" using the same language every day. Learn a set of expressions and phrases that can be used in every session. The following are some ideas for routines.

- Coming in, taking places and greeting
- Taking the register and individual comments, by teacher or Teddy, e.g. *Is María here? Oh yes, there you are. That's a nice sweater. Oooh it is cold today, Where's Ana today?* etc.
- Doing the weather, date, season and clock chart
- Changing Teddy's clothes and/or a wall-chart child's clothes according to the weather
- Watering the plants or looking after a pet
- Getting out equipment
- "How are you today, Teddy?" Circle Time
- "Teddy asks the questions" Circle Time
- "Let's count" wall chart time
- "Let's play a game" time
- "Let's sing" time
- "Let's paint a picture" time
- "Let's make" time
- "Let's look at the world" time
- "Let's chant" time
- "Let's listen to the cassette" time
- "Let's do a puzzle" time
- "Let's tell a story" time
- "Let's guess" time
- Putting things away
- Putting on coats
- "Time to go (home)". Saying goodbye and leaving

3. Use Teddy or another mascot to encourage expression and to attract and keep attention.
4. Use stories, songs, rhymes and associated games and activities as a fundamental part of the session.
5. Dramatise the stories, songs, etc. with your voice, puppets and the children themselves.
6. Learn language associated to various festivals.
7. Don't use a song, story or rhyme once only. Turn it into a routine and use it many times throughout the course.
8. Use wall-charts, picture books and posters as routines.
9. Learn a series of expressions and ways of building your own expressions for behavioural purposes.
10. Learn ways of helping children to "bring out" language, such as:

- giving options after a question, e.g. *How big is it? Is it big or small?*
- leaving a word open for children to say whilst gesturing. *Yes, it's very (**big**), isn't it?*
- using a song that the children know as a "tell-it-yourself" story. To do this, stop speaking at parts that the children know well and let them "fill in" those parts themselves, e.g. *"When Goldilocks goes to the (**house**) of the (**bears**), what do her (**blue eyes**) see? A (**bear**)"*

that is (**big**) and a (**bear that is small**) and a (**bear**) that is (**tiny**) and (**that is all**) and she (**counts**) them (**one, two, three**).

- telling stories with refrains.
- letting children speak through puppets, teddies, etc.
- using linguistic routines

Finally, if you build up your own personal repertoire of songs, rhymes, stories and associated activities, you will be able to make spontaneous use of these without having to depend on a CD or cassette!

Being able to say something, even just a song or rhyme, gives children confidence.

Linguistic Culture

Children's songs, rhymes, stories and games form an intrinsic part of linguistic culture and are important not only for the acquisition of schematic knowledge (language and notions that all members of the mother tongue share) but also because:

- they provide a natural way of learning blocks of language.
- they help you to keep the class in English.
- they can be used to acquire certain skills.
- they are essential for intonation.

However, linguistic culture also includes essential concepts such as behavioural norms and their associated language, social attitudes and so on.

Why sing and chant in class?

Firstly, because everybody remembers songs and rhymes learnt at school or learnt at any time during life. Music and rhythm produce a feeling of pleasure, which inspires us to learn in order to repeat. Any vocabulary or structures taught through a song will be remembered at a later stage and will help the older child to adapt and put into practice the knowledge accumulated.

Secondly, children's songs and nursery rhymes include many expressions, concepts and elements of collective memory, which eventually form part of a language.

Finally, and perhaps the most important reason, young children have an intrinsic interest in, and will spontaneously take part in, sound, rhythm and music, thereby practising pronunciation, stress and intonation, which are the equivalents in language of sound, rhythm and music. Song is the musical representation of a language, and can be used in the classroom together with rhymes, jingles, chants and story refrains to help children acquire and use the English "music" or intonation.

A few basic hints on intonation

These three very simple notions are easy to learn and apply and will make a huge difference to your intonation in the classroom.

1. The voice tends to go up when **information is not finished** and for **YES/NO questions**.
2. The voice tends to go down when **information is finished** and for **WH-questions and the second part of option questions**.
3. The voice tends to sound **louder longer and higher** on **stressed** words (usually **main verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, negative and final place auxiliaries and modals**). In English songs, especially children's songs, the tune tends to show the same voice movements as the words, so the song itself can help children to reproduce intonation.

Block language and structure assimilation through songs and rhymes

Look at this children's rhyme. Can you say what aspects of English a child can naturally assimilate with this rhyme? You will find some suggestions below.

Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been? I've been to London to see the Queen.

Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, what did you do there? I chased a little mouse under a chair.

Here are just a few suggestions:

- Downward voice movement for **WH-questions**
- Stressing and linking according to meaning and function
- Use of **where** and **what**
- Structure of questions
- Difference between **been** and **gone**
- Use of present perfect for completed actions without an established time
- Relationship between time and place
- Change of tense – present perfect to past simple – when place is determined
- Contraction of **I've**
- Adjective + noun
- Use of determiners **a** and **the**
- Function of **to** for movement and purpose
- Preposition of place - **under**
- Diminutive of cat

However, in the Early Learning environment, children not only assimilate linguistic aspects such as those suggested above. They are also learning about their world in general and incorporating other concepts into their store of knowledge, such as:

- What a cat is
- What a mouse is
- The characteristic behaviour of cat and mouse
- The concept of chasing and fleeing for survival
- The spatial concept of under a chair
- Size – big and small
- Size in relation to space (i.e. fitting in/under)
- Comparative size – a cat is bigger than a mouse, a cat is smaller than a child
- Past time
- Power relationships (cat v. mouse, queen, etc.)
- Geographical notions and distance – other places exist outside the local environment
- Forms of address – double use of name for respect and for attracting attention (typically found in children's stories and jokes – e.g. doctor, doctor; mummy, mummy, pussy cat, pussy cat).

At the same time, if they play the game related to the rhyme, children are learning to learn, to control different kinds of movement, to take turns, to participate, etc. as described in the general Early Learning goals below. It is amazing how much a child can learn from such a little rhyme!

Learning across the curriculum – Black is Black!

Perhaps the hardest part for an experienced teacher just moving into Early Learning is to get used to teaching concepts rather than equivalents. When older Young Learners (6+) learn, to give a very simple example, that "red" is the English word that corresponds to "rojo", they already have an understanding of the concept of "red" in their "knowledge of the world". However, the early learner is learning that "red" is "red", i.e. the name "red" and also what "red" is. We are teaching not only language, but also the world.

So, it makes sense to work hand in hand with the general curriculum teacher and to be aware of general early learning goals, whilst recognising that these are a guideline on children's development, not something which each child is required to demonstrate! A lot will depend on personalities and it is important that children are treated as individuals.

Our resources, therefore, should ideally cover all areas and ultimate goals of the early learning stage, which might be very simply summed up as follows:

creative development: exploring colour, texture, shape, form and space in 2 or 3 dimensions;

using imagination in art and design, music, dance, imaginative play, role play and stories;
exploring and using sound, rhythm, musical instruments and movement;
responding in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel;
communicating their ideas, thoughts and feelings by using a widening range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative role play, movement, designing and making, and a variety of songs and musical instruments;

mathematical development: recognising numerals, using number names in familiar contexts; counting objects reliably up to 3, 5 and 10;

calculating, solving practical problems, relating addition to combining two groups of objects, relating subtraction to 'taking away';

comparing quantity, size and weight, talking about, recognising and recreating simple patterns, describing the shape and size of solid and flat shapes;

using everyday words to describe position;

physical development: gross motor skills - moving with control, coordination, confidence, imagination and safety in a range of ways, e.g. slithering, shuffling, rolling, crawling, walking, running, jumping, skipping, sliding and hopping, jumping off an object and landing, balancing, climbing equipment/steps and directions, e.g. backwards, sideways and forwards;

using apparatus – pushing, pulling, sliding, swinging, touching, patting, throwing, kicking, catching, retrieving;

fine motor skills - manipulating materials and objects, hand-eye coordination and one-handed activities, picking up, releasing, arranging, threading, posting, buttoning, fastening;

sense of space – stopping and starting, adjusting speed or changing direction to avoid obstacles, negotiating space successfully when playing games, judging space, respecting others' personal space;

health and body – understanding good health habits for eating, sleeping, exercising and hygiene, etc., knowing own body;

knowledge and understanding

of the world: showing an awareness of change, investigating objects and materials using all senses as appropriate, finding out about and identifying features of living things, objects and events observed;

constructing objects using appropriate resources, tools and techniques;

finding out about and identifying the uses of everyday technology and using information and communication technology and programmable toys to support their learning;

gaining a sense of time and place - finding out about past and present events in their own lives, and in those of their families and other people they know

observing and identifying features in their local environment and in the natural world;

personal, social and

emotional development: being aware of home, school and community and learning to become independent, developing awareness of own needs, views and feelings and those of others, learning to respect other cultures, religions and beliefs;

learning to show curiosity and initiative, concentration and self-control, self-confidence and self-esteem;

working as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly; understanding the need for agreed values and codes of behaviour, understanding what is right and wrong and why, considering the consequences of words and actions.ⁱ

Crocodile Curriculum

Here is a very simple but extremely enjoyable rhyme for young children. The crocodile game is self-explanatory, but remember that when the crocodile SNAPS with its arms and catches a monkey, that monkey becomes part of the crocodile, making a "train" behind the "head" until all the monkeys are eaten. We have shown how the rhyme links across the curriculum and included some other activities (see below) apart from the game itself, although we are sure you can think of many more!

3+

Three/Five little monkeys

(Three) Five little monkeys sit in a tree
Along comes a crocodile very quietly
"Hey, Mr Crocodile, you can't catch me!"
SNAP

Knowledge and understanding of the world

- Concept of crocodile, characteristic, habitat, food, etc.
- Concept of monkey, characteristic, habitat, food, etc.

Creative development

- Exploring sound and rhythm (fast and slow).
- Learning a rhyme.
- Drama. Acting out the song.
- Exploring colour and shape.
- Making masks.
- Making puppets.

Physical development – fine motor skills

- Tracing a zigzag crocodile shape (head and teeth). Tracing rounded monkey shapes. Colouring. Cutting out. Making hand and finger puppets. (See below).
- Using finger puppets to dramatise the rhyme.
- Using yogurt pot crocodiles to catch monkeys. (See below).

Physical development – gross motor skills

- Moving slowly and quietly.
- Catching.
- Making a crocodile train to cross the room.

Mathematical Development

- Number recognition, addition + subtraction.
- Position.

Personal, social and emotional development

- Learning to take turns (to be the crocodile or monkeys).
- Learning to work together (to form the crocodile and move together to catch the monkeys).
- Learning that eating makes you grow.
- Considering the consequences of words and actions (taunting produces a reaction).

Language development

- Reciting a rhyme
- Stress, rhythm and linking
- Sound clusters - thr, tr, cr, kw, sn
- Title of respect – Mr
- Singular (crocodile comes) and plural (monkeys sit)
- Subject-verb inversion after adverb of direction
- Adverb of manner ending "ly"
- Number + adjective + noun group – three little monkeys
- Modal – can't
- Hey – attracting attention
- Block language – you can't catch me
- Speech act - SNAP

Mr Crocodile Activities

1. Mr Crocodile Game

3, 5 or 10 children, according to age, are monkeys. 1 child is Mr Crocodile. All children chant and dramatise the rhyme. Mr Crocodile comes along very quietly (lower voice to loud whisper level for this line) with arms stretched in a scissor movement. Monkeys only sing the taunting line. Mr Crocodile snaps arms round a monkey and takes the monkey away. That monkey

makes a train holding the first child by the shoulders or waist and Mr Crocodile is now a bit longer. The chant is repeated until all the monkeys have been “eaten” and Mr Crocodile is very big.

2. “Catching Monkeys” game.

- a) Use yoghurt cartons or plastic cups.
- b) Draw a crocodile, paint it green and stick it on the bottom of the carton/cup.
- c) Draw circles (3 or 5) on a sheet of A4 paper using the rim of the carton/cup.
- d) Draw, cut out and stick monkeys in the circles.
- e) Teacher calls a number and children must catch the right number of monkeys.
- f) Alternatively, children throw a dice and catch the right number of monkeys.

3. Finger puppets.

- a) Colour the crocodile’s head and the monkeys and cut out. (See below)
- b) Use a paper fastener to join the bottom jaw to the top jaw.
- c) Stick a strip of card on the back of each jaw so that you can open and close the mouth using a scissor movement of the forefinger and ring finger.
- d) Colour and cut out the monkeys and stick the tail round to the body, using sellotape, to make finger puppets.
- e) Open the crocodile’s mouth and “eat” the monkeys.

4. The Crocodile’s Tummy Wall Chart

- a) Make a large poster of a crocodile and a tree with several branches.
- b) Stick 5 pieces of Velcro in the crocodile’s tummy and 5 on different branches of the tree.
- c) Draw, colour and cut out 5 monkeys (small enough to fit into the crocodile’s tummy) and stick a piece of Velcro on the back of each monkey.
- d) Stick the monkeys on the poster using the Velcro. If 4 are in the tree, 1 is in the crocodile’s tummy, etc.

5. The Crocodile’s Tummy Puzzle Sheet 1

- a) Draw five crocodiles.
- b) Draw a tree with 5 branches and a large number (1-5) on each branch.
- c) Draw a number of monkeys in each crocodile’s tummy.
- d) Children join each crocodile to the correct number in the tree according to the number of monkeys in its tummy.

6. The Crocodile’s Tummy Puzzle Sheet 2

- a) Draw a series of five crocodile-tree images.
- b) Draw a number of monkeys in the crocodile’s tummy for each image.
- c) Children complete the images by drawing the number of monkeys left in the tree.

All that remains to say is that early learning is about learning through play so have fun and enjoy it!

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Teachers moving into the Early Learning EFL area might find the following areas helpful:

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3. Early Learning Curriculum
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2. Early Learning EFL Teaching

Brumfit, C. Moon, J. and Tongue, R. (Eds.) (1991) *Teaching English to Children. From Practice to Principle*. Collins.

Dunn, O. (1993) *Beginning English with Young Learners*. MacMillan

Halliwell, S. (1992) *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*. Longman.

López Tellez, G., Rodríguez Suárez, M.T. (1999) *Ring a ring of roses: reflexiones y propuestas para trabajar la lengua inglesa en educación infantil*. Servicio de publicaciones. Universidad de Oviedo.

Rodríguez, T. et al. (2002) *Teacher Training and the Teaching of Foreign Languages in the Early Stages*. CPR Oviedo.

3. Early Learning Curriculum

The following documents can be downloaded from the QCA website (see below).

Communication, language and literacy, QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK

Planning for learning in the foundation stage QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK

Curriculum guidance in the foundation stage, QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK

4. On-line Information

CILT. Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research. www.cilt.org.uk (Also has useful links to other related websites.)

European Early Language Learning Teacher Training Project.

www.educastur.princast.es/cpr/oviedo/linguapro (Also has useful links to other related websites.)

Nacell National Network for Early Language Learning. www.nnell.org.uk (Also has useful links to other related websites.)

QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK www.qca.org.uk

The Macmillan website onestopenenglish.com

The Longman Pearson website longman.com/young-learners/teachers/resources

The Santillana website www.indexnet.santillana.es/scripts/indexnet/infantil has many useful links to general and specific early learning websites

5. Resources

All the above mentioned websites offer a variety of resource books either for purchase or for free use.

The teacher's notes corresponding to various course books are usually full of good advice and ideas.

ⁱ Adapted from *Curriculum guidance in the foundation stage*, QCA Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000, Department for Education and Employment, UK

The author investigated early learning of EFL from a contextualised perspective. Data were collected from 173 Croatian YLs of EFL who were followed for three years (Grades Two, Three and Four). Processes and outcomes of early EFL are analysed considering a number of relevant contextual and individual learner factors as well as their interactions. Insights into early FL classrooms show that in most situations ELL is based on form-focused teaching (DeKeyser and Larsen-Hall, 2004) and that young learners are exposed to "minimal input situations" (Larsen-Hall, 2008). Nikolov (2009) also points to the frequently low L2 proficiency of teachers who cannot secure native-like levels of their young learners, which are often unrealistically expected by parents and policy-makers.