

## Conferenza internazionale sull'infanzia

### CROSS-DISCIPLINARY ASPECT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL : FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Fluency in English, nowadays considered the vehicular language of our globalized society, is one of the key elements which the need for school modernization is focusing on.

Such intention also emerges from the document "*La Buona Scuola*", which mentions the strengthening of foreign languages early learning from pre-primary among the proposals of the new government.

In order to check the current status of the events, and reflect upon the experience of teaching English in Italian pre-primary schools, in March 2014 UIL SCUOLA in cooperation with IRASE Nazionale (Institute for Academic, Social and Educational Research) promoted a meeting between English language teachers and curricular teachers working in pre-primary and primary schools in different regions.

The results of the workshop are included in a brochure that collects methodological reflections as well as concrete experiences launched autonomously in some schools. A particularly interesting proposal is the one started in school year 2013/2014 in a comprehensive school, the "Istituto Comprensivo di Foglianise", in Castelpoto, by a curricular teacher who has been designing and implementing integrated teaching actions since 2007-2008.

The school under consideration consists of two open classroom sections with four teachers dealing with five "Campi di esperienza". In particular, the teacher sponsoring the project, is entrusted with the area named "I discorsi e le parole – Speeches and words" as well as with various aspects of the different areas of experience (Campi di esperienza).

Although English language is part of the area "I discorsi e le parole", as stated in the "*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo*" (National Guidelines for the school curriculum), in the above mentioned project it is also meant to be a tool for educational and linguistic development supporting all the other areas of experience. The linguistic objectives are not determined by using the language itself as a criterium, but by using the programmatic objectives of the curriculum.

In this perspective, **L2** is not configured as external to the curriculum, but as a **vehicle of the curriculum itself**. In designing a path towards the foreign language that respects this fundamental principle, the teacher takes into account two fundamental elements: the conquest of autonomy and the need to consider the "*here and now*" as the starting point of any activity.

The learning units contain the definition of the aspect of the school educational offer to which the activity of L2 English is linked, the definition of the cognitive objective/s, the definition of the language item/s chosen relatively to English as an L2.

Another key point which English syllabus takes into account is to provide the context of meaning, thus making learning happen in a natural way, by including English language also in the everyday routine. In pre-primary schools, there are many moments of the day which are strongly characterized by routine actions: entrance to the school, break time, laboratory activities, lunch, time to go back home... The teacher in charge of the project, being the curricular teacher and therefore attending all of children's' activities, takes advantage of these favorable moments by inserting certain linguistic elements of L2 to ensure that they actually become part of the children's daily life (for example by greeting children the morning, when they get to school, "Hello!", and when they go back home, "Bye bye!").

The activities in English are performed in two typologies of groups according to the contents: *great group* (heterogeneous for age, in which the activities of routine are also included) involving pupils of 3, 4 and 5 years and *small group* (homogeneous for age) involving 5 year-old pupils.

The work is done in small groups for approximately 2 hours per meeting, for an overall amount of 12 hours per month.

The project develops throughout the school year, following the curriculum planning of all "Campi di esperienza". In this way children have the opportunity not only to familiarize with the English language, but also to better internalize concepts and competences relating to the other areas.

The proposal focuses primarily on a mediator character, a puppet, which fits optimally within the methodology of kindergarten as these usually utilize such aids along with stories, fairy tales, games,

songs and role plays for educational purposes. The puppet creates each time a real situation and takes the kids to live in a playful atmosphere without ever leaving an experiential context. Every story, tale, song etc. is contextualized in space and time.

The prevailing methodology is global and comprehensive because individual methods are selected and integrated organically in an integrated approach perspective.

It allows to use the various components (cognitive, behavioral, interactive, affective) combined with other activities capable of stimulating different types of intelligence and sensory abilities, encouraging the child to start understanding and enjoying the foreign language.

By performing specific games and guided activities, exploring sound-expressive and figurative-symbolic environments (*Immagini, suoni e colori - Images, sounds and colors*), children begin their journey of knowledge in the second language, being encouraged to express themselves in their relationship with others (*Il sè e l'altro - The self and the other*), with their own body (*Il corpo e il movimento - Body and movement*) and with the world, by observing objects, animals and natural events (*La conoscenza del mondo - Knowledge of the world*).

Thanks to the cross-disciplinary teaching mode (which implies the use of the standardized method which at secondary school is called CLIL), made possible by the presence of a curricular teacher who is therefore internal to the school, we can certainly say that the process started in Castelpoto can be a good and effective answer to the questions of many schools on how to move forward, what goals to pursue and how to pursue them, especially in compliance with the "*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione*" (2012).

Given the initial consideration pointing on education as strategic sector and turning point to start rebuilding our society, we need to create waterfall intervention strategies that start right from pre-primary education. This is the reason why we not only deem necessary those interventions that enhance its effectiveness, but also a broader strategy able to align learning goals by building a curriculum which is both horizontal and vertical and includes English language teaching from pre-primary level. This need becomes even stronger if we consider the levels set by the Common European Framework (A1-A2, B1-B2, C1-C2), which curriculum must inevitably face nowadays, in the perspective of a clear link among the various degrees of schools.

UIL SCUOLA, after stressing the importance of quality education made possible through the choice of an efficacious method, also wants to reiterate how important it is to build aligned and coherent way, with well-trained teachers, preferably internal to the school where possible (refer to the training value of the experience of Castelpoto).

As a closing remark, we would like to mention a slogan of the "Coordinamento Nazionale per le Politiche dell'infanzia e della scuola" (National Coordination for Policies on Childhood and School) which we believe should encompass the sense of any future action: "***In the childhood of today is the country of tomorrow.***"