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**Conference ECEC & ELL  
Early Childhood and Care & Early Language Learning**

**Reggio Emilia: December 2014**

# **ELL in Europe: In search of Best Practice**

**Richard Johnstone**

# OVERVIEW

## 1. Introduction

- Language Instinct
- Multimodality
- Children's development of language functions
- Young good, but Old also good

## 2. Two authoritative EC documents

- A Policy Handbook
- Examples of Good Practice

## 3. Some insights from research

- Food for thought

## 4. Some further findings and implications

- Scotland, Finland, Spain
- But what IS good practice? How may it be tracked?
- Future implications

# **PART ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

# Multimodality

## Learning in the Early Years: A Multimodal Perspective

27th November 2014, 10:30-16:00 – London Knowledge Lab

- This seminar investigates how a multimodal perspective can provide insights into learning in the early years. Young children are surrounded by, engage with, interpret and express meanings communicated in a huge variety of ways.
- As they interact with others, explore everyday objects and play, meanings are made, for example, in looking, running, holding, making graphic marks, acting out, and so on, as well as speech.
- Based on research video data gathered in the nursery, the Reception class and the home, we will explore how a multimodal approach to qualitative analysis can inform our interpretation and understanding of early learning.

## CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- For M. A. K. Halliday what the child develops is a "meaning potential". Learning language is *Learning how to mean*, the name of his well-known early study of a child's language development.
- Halliday (1975) identifies seven functions that language has for children in their early years.
- Children are motivated to develop language because it serves certain purposes or functions for them.

# HALLIDAY'S SEVEN INITIAL FUNCTIONS OF CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE

The first four functions help the child to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs.

- **Instrumental:**
  - Express their needs (e.g. "Want juice")
- **Regulatory:**
  - Tell others what to do (e.g. "Go away")
- **Interactional:**
  - Make contact with others and form relationships (e.g. "Love you, Mummy")
- **Personal:**
  - Express feelings, opinions, and individual identity (e.g. "Me good girl")

## HALLIDAY CONTINUED

The next three functions are heuristic, imaginative, and representational, all helping the child to come to terms with his or her environment.

- **Heuristic:**
  - Gain knowledge about the environment (e.g. 'What the tractor doing?')
- **Imaginative:**
  - Tell stories and jokes, and create an imaginary environment.
- **Representational:**
  - Convey facts and information.

**PART TWO**

**TWO AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS**

**FROM THE EC**

# **TWO KEY AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS**

European Strategic Framework for Education and Training  
Language learning at pre-primary school level  
Making it efficient and sustainable

**A POLICY HANDBOOK**  
**&**  
**EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

Accessible on the EC Languages Policy website

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## **The purpose of this book:**

- “ .... to draw attention to the conditions for success – and potential pitfalls – of ELL by furthering the debate and proposing tried and tested solutions”.

## **The Importance of pre-school education:**

- “ ..... in 2009 the EU Education ministers set a target that at least 95% of children aged between four and the age at which compulsory primary education should start should participate in early childhood education”.

## **Group of National Experts:**

- Early teaching of a second / foreign language
- Early teaching of the language of instruction and of a second language to children with a minority or migrant background
- Covering formal and informal settings before primary school

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## **ELL at pre-primary means:**

- Means “systematic awareness-raising or exposure to more than one language from an early childhood and care setting in a pre-primary-school context”.

## **The benefits of ELL. It can:**

- Open children’s minds to multilingualism and different cultures
- Enhance individual and social development
- Increase capacity to empathize with others
- Enhance competences such as comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving
- Increase powers of concentration and strengthen self-confidence
- Help children become aware of their identity and of cultural values
- Raise awareness of diversity and of cultural variety, hence fostering understanding and respect.

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## Some claims that are made:

- Young children's second/foreign language acquisition is similar in many ways to the acquisition of their mother tongue, which is natural and effortless
- **“An early start is ... essential to gain native-speaker levels of competence, particularly on pronunciation and intonation”.**
- Start early means learning can take place over a longer period ... **“when the young brain learns language, it tends to develop an enhanced capacity to learn languages throughout life”.**
- **Children can transfer into the mother tongue the concepts and terms they have learned through the second/foreign language, and vice-versa. Hence, language-processing in a multilingual mind helps stimulate cognitive competence”.**
- **Socio-economic conditions, however, can and do influence results, and a less well-off background seems to correlate with weaker performance in second/foreign language learning”.**

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## Proven orientations for ELL

“Practical experience as well as academic evidence suggest that ELL as part of general early childhood education & care should pursue the following goals:

- **Support intercultural education**
- **Foster the personal development of the child**
- **Show consistency. Where appropriate there should be introduction to the same second/foreign language which will subsequently be learned in primary school as part of the formal curriculum within a lifelong learning experience**

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## Equity

- Language activities, with some exceptions, at pre-primary level are not formally structured
- **Marked differences in staff competences**
- Resources and opportunities unevenly distributed, both geographically and within difference socio-economic groups
- **Better education often means access to good quality tuition for the advantaged**
- For some children access is more difficult – for example, where parents are asked to contribute additional fees for language learners

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## Quality & Consistency

- In most cases, pre-primary settings do not have specific objectives for second/foreign language leaning
- Programmes for fostering multilingual and intercultural competences at pre-primary level should be designed according to context and resources
- It is important that children are not put under pressure and are always able to express themselves in the language they feel most comfortable with
- There is increasing recognition that children need to 'learn how to learn'
- A great deal of good practice in ELL is in multilingual and border areas involving exchanges and joint initiatives between different communities.

## ELL POLICY HANDBOOK: PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES

### Age-appropriate processes

- “Pedagogical processes for ELL should be integrated into early childhood pedagogy and should not be formalized or designed to ‘fast-track’ youngsters out of their childhood experiences”.
- **“ELL should not be fostered as a specific subject but rather as a communication tool in other activities”**
- “ELL staff should provide an enriching, engaging environment ..... should help extend children’s learning opportunities (use of scaffolding) ..... should not be any grading”.

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK: PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES

## Level of agreement

- Review of practice in Member States suggests that there is little evidence of agreed processes, uniformity of approach or established indications of agreement in ELL

## Existing models

- **ELL processes range from language awareness-raising or exposure to bilingual approaches through to full immersion programmes**
- Working in pre-primary settings through the target language can help children reach similar or at least comparable competences in the first-language / mother tongue and in the target language .....
- **In this way, the language is acquired spontaneously rather than learned.**
- By linking language learning to experience in realistic settings, the integration of language and curriculum leads to *construction* learning as opposed to *instruction* learning

## ELL POLICY HANDBOOK: PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES

### Language awareness-raising or exposure

- The main aim is "to develop the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts of one or more languages and the ability to understand them in an interactive way".

### CLIL

- " ..... an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium on the teaching and learning of non-language content"

### Language tandems

- Tandems of staff using different languages, so children's everyday activities take place in two languages in the same classroom .... Based on the one person – one language principle. This requires good co-ordination between the two people in charge of the same group of children and an agreed approach.

### Monolingual exposure

- Immersion in an official or minority/regional language other than the child's first language/mother tongue. The language of instruction is in fact the TL

# ELL POLICY HANDBOOK

## CHILDREN WITH A MINORITY OR MIGRANT BACKGROUND

### Pre-primary setting

- “Pre-primary staff may have to deal with children from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, different ethnicities and languages, as well as diverse religious or cultural backgrounds”

### Out of the pre-primary setting

- “What happens in the home environment is as important as, if not more important than, the activity which takes place outside the home, in a pre-primary setting for example”
- Importance of encouraging parents to become involved in school events and have opportunities to observe their child’s class
- Good to give families opportunities to discuss their concerns related to multilingualism, to exchange experiences and to obtain parental guidance
- It is important to “tap into this wealth and capitalize on the diversity as a positive rather than a purely challenging component of the learning environment”.

# EC: ELL GOOD PRACTICES

## Has sections on:

- Equity, consistency, quality and continuity (6 short reports)
  - Pedagogical processes (10 short reports)
  - Appropriate skills and competences for staff (4 short reports)
  - Children with a minority or migrant background (5 short reports)
  - Stakeholders (3 short reports)
- 
- **I shall selectively identify what seem to me to be key points in FOUR of these reports**
  - **But there is much in these four reports that I will not have time do discuss**
  - **There is no suggestion that the four selected reports are the best of the bunch. All the reports are well worth reading**

## EC: ELL GOOD PRACTICES **Report A**

### **“(Very) early language learning with Bear, Photobooks, Digital technology and Parents”**

- **Key informant is in an Institute of School Education**
- **Children aged 3-5 in kindergarten**
- **Shape an attitude of curiosity towards other languages and cultures**
- **Inform parents of benefits of ELL**
- **Trying out an innovative teaching approach involving photobooks**
- **Use photobooks to teach 3 foreign languages (English, German, Spanish)**
- **Implement CLIL**
- **Employ ICT at pre-school level**
- **Prepare children for life in the society of the future**
- **Photobooks involve songs, rhymes, chants, TPR activities, art & craft activities, and are used to promote parental involvement in children’s learning**

# Report A continued

- **Weaknesses include**
  - **Domination of English (teaching time in all three languages should be equal);**
  - **Not enough time to implement CLIL in full**
- **Future: Evaluation of undertaken activities**
  - **Survey for parents / Survey for participating pre-service and in-service teachers**
  - **Electronic dissemination of the project's results.**

# EC: ELL GOOD PRACTICES **Report B**

## **“Let’s play in English”**

- **Children aged 3-6**
- **Story read aloud in English, supported by visual aids - pictures and miming**
- **Text is then dramatized. Teacher plays the voices of the various characters**
- **Children in a circle, repeat what they hear**
- **Teacher asks questions about the illustrations, makes links with the children’s everyday lives (weather, clothes, colours, events ....)**
- **Perceived as a game – children laugh a lot**
- **Eager to continue their communication with the teacher in English, they learn new vocabulary very quickly**
- **The narrative formats consist of simple storyline featuring children’s real-life experiences, thereby allowing the children to make inferences and predictions about storylines**

## Report B continued

- Young learners are motivated to learn English through a multisensory approach to narrative formats.
- **As children become competent with the language, more and more can be added.**
- Learning the word 'calendar' for example led to days of the week, months of the year and seasons of the year. Days of the week were learned in a rap song that the children loved
- **Problem: Lack of funding has led to a reduction of teaching time.**
- **Future: New multimedia pack with six beautifully illustrated storybooks and interactive DVD with music and songs, to be published shortly.**

## EC: ELL GOOD PRACTICES **Report C**

### “Drei Hände – Tri roke – Tre mani”

- Aim: to foster foreign language learning at pre-primary level (German, Italian, Slovenian)
- **Children aged 3-6 in pre-primary kindergarten**
- Project currently realized in 3 communities (one in Austria, one in Slovenia and one in Italy) and in three languages.
- **Kindergarten pedagogues are brought in following a rotation system**
- In each of the three affiliated kindergartens, the second and third languages are each present once per week
- **The kindergarten pedagogues were trained specifically for this project**
- The project receives scholarly advice and support (University), and financial support (EU, community and regional authorities)
- **The initiative was started by the mother of a kindergarten child**
- Planned to extend the project to primary schools

## Report C continued

- **Evaluation in the form of a questionnaire in the three languages for parents and teachers (pre-primary and primary) to evaluate:**
  - The acceptance of the trilingual model
  - Perceptions of linguistic development of the children by parents and teachers
  - Acceptance of the time spent in the target languages by teachers & parents
- **Results:**
  - High acceptance of the model by parents & teachers
  - Children's positive development in the two new languages and in the first language
  - Amount of time spent on each language about right.

## EC: ELL GOOD PRACTICES Report D

### “Lerne die Sprache des Nachbarn”

- Children aged 2-6
- A bi-national, multi-professional team.
- Daily contact between German and French pre-primary children under one roof within a commonly developed conception.
- Contact with children of the same age from a neighbouring country helps them to experience commonalities and differences, promoting tolerance and helping to reduce/remove prejudices and anxieties
- From early childhood, developing a basis for social attitudes, values and contacts.
- Teacher as facilitator, needs to develop a relationship of trust with each child and show empathy.
- Importance of playing and playfulness

# Report D continued

- There should always be a connection between language and action
- **Emphasis on implicit, intuitive learning**
- **Avoid blame, recrimination, pure translation.**
- **Sensitizing children to the sonorities and musicality of different languages**
- **Facilitating discovery of 'the other' and of 'elsewhere'**
- **Importance of including, respecting and building up the child's first language, rather than always keeping it out.**
- **No special finances required for the project**
- **Children show astonishing capacity for memorization when words and phrases are set to music, and also for reproducing a native speaker accent**
- **Children show real pleasure in 'playing' with languages**
- **Children often ask for new words**
- **Children show clear willingness to continue speaking another language outside their sessions with the native speakers**
- **Future aspects include development and documentation forms in relation to each child's development.**

**PART THREE**  
**SOME INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH**

**GIVING US**  
**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT**

# COGNITIVE BENEFITS OF BILINGUALISM

Barac & Bialystok, 2011

‘An active focus of research since 2000 has been the effect of bilingualism on cognitive ability: specifically, the set of cognitive abilities known as the executive function. **These are the processes responsible for attention, selection, inhibition, shifting and flexibility that are at the centre of all higher thought.** Exciting new research is now providing strong evidence that early bilingualism has the power to set in place precocious development of these crucial skills’.

‘In contrast to early warnings about negative consequences, bilingualism turns out to be an experience that **BENEFITS** many aspects of children’s development. **Although there are documented delays in acquiring some formal aspects of each language, such as vocabulary (Bialystok 2010), bilingualism has either no effect (intelligence) or positive effects (metalinguistic awareness, cognitive development) on development.**’

# YOUNGER & OLDER LEARNERS COMPARED

## Younger learners

- Still access their intuitive language-acquisition capability?
- More sensitive to the sound system
- Less 'language anxious'
- More time available overall
- Productive links between first and additional languages
- Acquisition and learning processes over time complement each other
- Positive influence on general development: cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, hence identity.

## Older learners

- Make use of existing conceptual map of the world
- Experienced in discourse, e.g. manage conversations (e.g. Scarcella & Higa, 1985)
- Wider range of strategies, e.g.
  - note-taking
  - summarising
  - reference materials
- Sense of WHY, WHAT and HOW, to guide their learning

# IMPORTANCE OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF INPUT FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Muñoz, C. (2008). Symmetries and Asymmetries of Age Effects in Naturalistic and Instructed L2 Learning. *Applied Linguistics* 29/4: 578–596

- In foreign language learning studies the consensus concerning the relationship between age of acquisition and second language outcomes is that **older starters have a faster rate of learning .....** No evidence exists that an early start in foreign language learning leads to higher proficiency levels after the same amount of instructional time, and **even younger starters with more instructional time have often failed to show a particularly substantial advantage in terms of long-term proficiency benefits (p586).**
- Recent studies conducted in foreign language settings have clearly illustrated the role of input and exposure in the equation: **an early start leads to success but only provided that it is associated with enough significant exposure (p591).**
- That is, an early starting age produces **long-term benefits** when associated with greater time and massive exposure, as in immersion programmes, **but not when associated with** limited time and exposure, as in typical foreign language learning classrooms (p582).

# PROGRESSION: UPS & DOWNS

Mitchell (2003)

**Second language learning is not like climbing a ladder. It is:**

- **a complex and recursive process with multiple interconnections and backslidings, and**
- **complex trade-offs between advances in fluency, accuracy and complexity.**

Pelzer-Karpf & Zangl (1997)

**Children's utterances seemed impressive in Years 1&2**

- **but then in Year 3 went through a phase of 'Systemturbulenz' in which their grammar control seemed to fall apart**
- **when the cognitive demands of their tasks were raised to the point that temporarily their grammar-systems could not fully cope**
- **But by Year 4 it sorted itself out.**

# PART FOUR

**EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES**

**BUT WHAT IS GOOD PRACTICE AND HOW MAY IT BE TRACKED?**

**THE FUTURE**

# PART FOUR

## SOME FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS: RESEARCH AND ANECDOTAL

From projects in Scotland in which I myself was involved:

- **Scottish Gaelic** in pre-primary playgroups and early primary total immersion
- **Partial Immersion in French** in Primary 1 and 2, children aged 5-6

Highlight the following issues:

- **Value of pre-primary experience**
- **Value of massive exposure to TL**
- **Early introduction of reading & writing**
- **Value of new technology**
- **Value of proactive national parent group**
- **High performance in both Scottish Gaelic and English**
- **Combatting strong socio-economic disadvantage**
- **Benefits to parents and whole families**
- **Involvement of children with physical impairments**
- **High proficiency in French and high confidence in speaking English**
- **Dependency on funding, & Sustainability**

# CLIL

## FINLAND

### Grades 1-3 at school in Finland

- **CLIL students (25% in EFL) compared with mainstream non-CLIL students**
  - CLIL students language development was quicker
  - It was also different: After 1-word phase in Grades 1&2, suddenly full-blown sentences in Grade 3
  - Mainstream pupils progressed through multi-word fragments but failed to produce full-blown sentences by end of Grade 5
- **Three years of CLIL needed (Grades 1-3) for completion of implicit L2 development, leading to fine-tuning activities from Grade 4 onwards.** *(Järvinen, H-J., 2008)*

# FINLAND cntd

- **Implications for Teaching:**
- **The CLIL classroom environment CAN trigger natural L2 acquisition**
- **CLIL teachers need high level of L2 proficiency**
- **Importance of:**
  - **Focusing on language as well as on content**
  - **Supporting accuracy as well as fluency, and of exploring deep meaning (e.g. content-specific concepts; higher-order thinking skills).**
  - **Challenging pupils' comprehension**
  - **Creating opportunities for pupils to produce fairly elaborate stretches of expression, not simply 1or2-word responses.**

# FOUR COMPONENTS OF 'GOOD PRACTICE'

## 1. Good Activities

Implementing activities which are desirable

## 2. Good Teaching

Doing these activities well / skilfully / smoothly /coherently .....

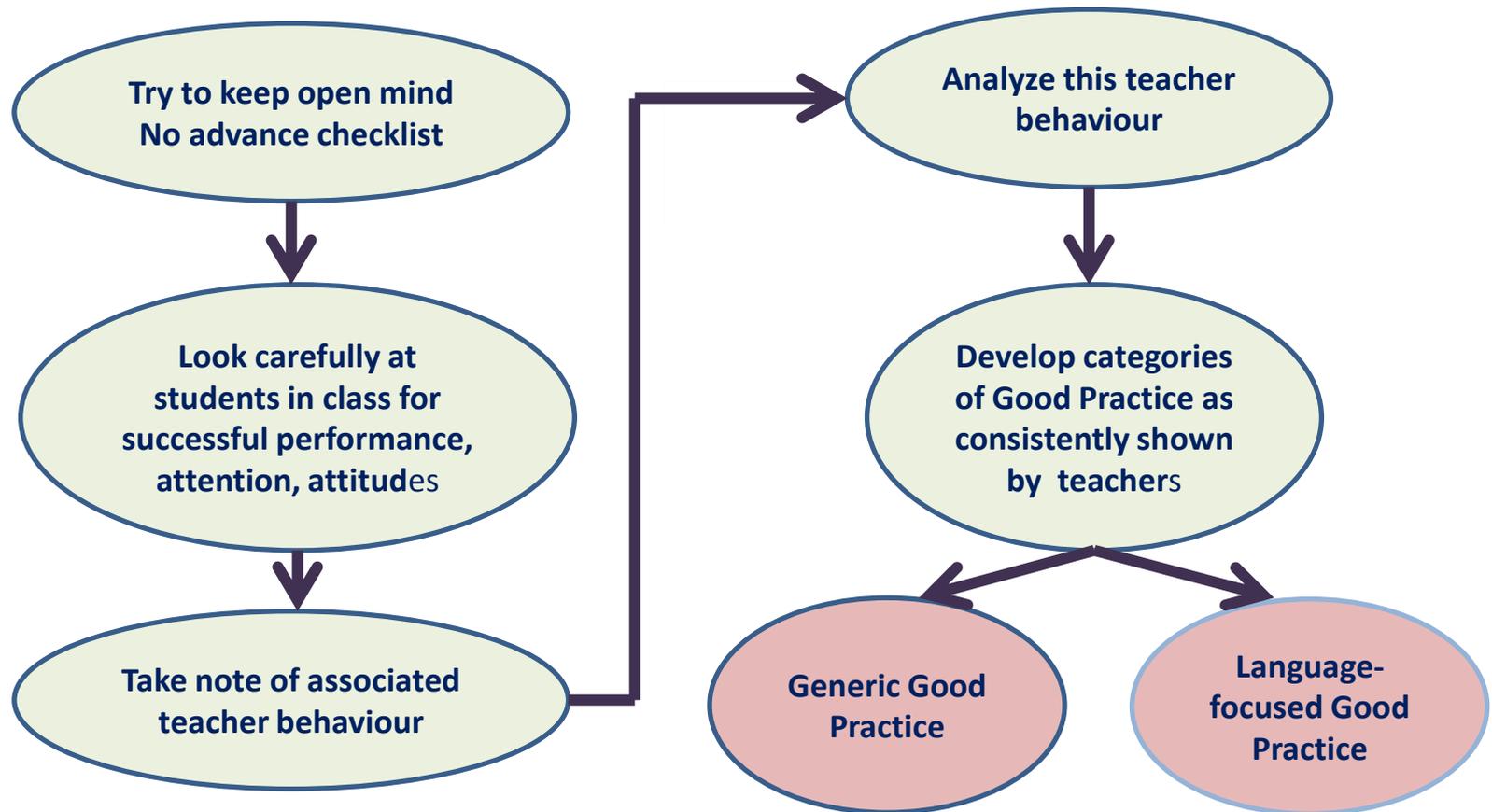
## 3. Good Pupil Involvement

Taking careful account of effects on pupils / students

## 4. Good Cognition

Moment to moment decision-making; interpreting signs; deciding how to make the best of the context in which one is working

# ONE WAY OF TRACKING GOOD PRACTICE (BEP Evaluation, Spain)



# GOOD PRACTICE 3 (continued)

## Generic good practice occurred where teachers

- had clear objectives for lessons
- provided clear explanations
- were well organised
- led lessons which had a variety of activities rather than one activity alone
- ensured smooth transitions from one activity to the next
- varied the stimulus rather than teaching in one mode only
- were fair and involved all students rather than a select group only
- were helpful and responsive
- showed enthusiasm for teaching and for their subject
- had high expectations of all students
- maximised time on task, i.e. getting the full value for the time available in each lesson.

# CHILDREN'S CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE AND TEACHERS' GOOD PRACTICE IN *INFANTIL* AND EARLY PRIMARY

From the Independent evaluation of the National BEP (Spain)\_

- The lessons observed in Study 5 which focuses on younger children in infants and early primary show substantial progression in pupils' learning during their initial years. Initially, their activity is based on actions, songs, chants, games, objects and visuals. Their utterances are of two sorts: learnt phrases and individual words, the latter often in response to the teacher's questions. Their pronunciation is generally very good and they show enthusiasm for what is asked of them. They also show high speed of comprehension and an ability to demonstrate this quickly through actions and mimes.
- By Year 2 of primary school, they have moved into the use of English for doing science in the form of studying the environment. They learn to understand and to complete correctly quite complex incomplete utterances given by the teacher; and they are challenged to provide longer utterances in response to technical questions and which show some degree of verbal reasoning (e.g. ... 'because there is a lot of rubbish ...') and they are acquiring increasing amounts of technical language which derives from the environmental theme they are studying (e.g. 'viviparous').

# BEP (SPAIN) EVALUATION CONTINUED

- The teachers are generally calm, organized and encouraging. Their English is good, as is their planning and organization, and initially they make use of established routines. They have high expectations of their pupils. When environmental studies is introduced at the primary school stage, this is intended and taken seriously, though with no obvious loss of enjoyment, and there is a focus not only on subject-matter and relevant activity but also on the sorts of language that are needed to do environmental studies well. This includes encouragement of accuracy and recap of vocabulary (e.g. 'fish, fin, scales') and the pronunciation of particular sounds in different words (e.g. 'rooster; sister').
- **Study 5 shows the benefit of beginning at a young age, provided that the teaching is appropriate, as it was in the classes observed. Knowledge, understanding, insights, attitudes, routines and skills are all being developed in these early years which explain in part at least the promising subsequent attainments of students as observed in Studies 1 & 3.**

# Supportive Reporting

Throughout the year, AMY has been working with a group of friendly children in developing her language proficiency. Since February 2008, the group has been carrying out listening and writing activities based on the stories selected from the “Listen, Discuss and Do” series. Jasmine always requires more time to listen to the story before she can grasp the main gist of each section. Through detailed discussions in the group, she is able to follow instructions and draw lively pictures. Jasmine and the other children enjoy all the follow-up activities and she has demonstrated increasing ability to predict, infer and interpret meaning from pictures and text.

In order to help AMY acquire the knowledge of phonemes and word building, one-to-one direct tuition has also been provided since April 2008. Recently, she has grasped the concepts of sound-symbol relationship and phonic blends, which has helped her to read more fluently with better intonation. AMY also finds it difficult to use positional words correctly. Therefore, tasks have been assigned to her to grasp the concept, and clarification in Cantonese is necessary from time to time.

## SUPPORTIVE REPORTING cntd

- **AMY's identity is nurtured by a supportive educational process in her state primary school and the local voluntary Chinese school (where the role of her parents and volunteers from the local Chinese community is important).**
- **The primary school's approach to reporting seems admirable.**
- **In one integrated text, we are given rich information about the child's personality, social interaction, cognitive skills and language development. There is no grading**
- **The text offers a diagnosis, a plan based on the diagnosis and a follow-up review of progress in relation to the plan.**
- **It is the result of extensive collaboration between mainstream class-teacher and ESOL specialist.**

**Further Reading: ELT Journal Special issue**  
**‘Teaching English to Young Learners’ Vol 68, Issue 3. July 2014**

Fiona Copland and Sue Garton

**Editor's Choice: Key themes and future directions in teaching English to young learners: introduction to the Special Issue**

Janet Enever

**Primary English teacher education in Europe**

Evdokia Karavas

**Implementing innovation in primary EFL: a case study in Greece**

Sandie Mourão

**Taking play seriously in the pre-primary English classroom**

Yuko Goto Butler, Yuumi Someya, and Eiji Fukuhara

**Online games for young learners’ foreign language learning**

# Further Reading

## Same journal & issue

Yvette Coyle and Remei Gómez Gracia

**Using songs to enhance L2 vocabulary acquisition in preschool children**

Lixian Jin, Xiaohua Liang, Changsheng Jiang, Jie Zhang, Yuan Yuan, and Qun Xie

**Studying the motivations of Chinese young EFL learners through metaphor analysis**

Sharon Besser and Alice Chik

**Narratives of second language identity amongst young English learners in Hong Kong**

Mario E. López-Gopar

**Teaching English critically to Mexican children**

Peter Sayer and Ruth Ban

**Young EFL students' engagements with English outside the classroom**

# PUPIL INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

**Copland & Garton (2014) ELT Journal 68,3,223-230**

- **XXXXX's groundbreaking work suggests:**
- **the need to introduce 'child perspectives' into research**
- **shifting the focus to children's concerns and agendas and seeing them as 'co-researchers'**
- **acknowledging that children are 'capable of providing useful and reliable insights into their own lives' as well as being 'resourceful and knowledgeable, especially concerning their own experiences'.**
- **Child-centred researchers ..... suggest using participatory activities such as drawings, photographs, music, and storytelling for data collection.**