

How-to... Early Years



Richard: Hello, bonjour and welcome. Today, we are looking at teaching languages to early year pupils. Today with me again, we have Thea and Nadine, hello... So, Thea what can you say to us about Early Years?

Thea: From my experience, engaging children from a young age to learn another language is easy if you know how!

Nadine: The secret is for them to learn the language through play as this is what children want to do and like to do all day, every day, if given the chance!

Richard: So how can we link this idea of playing to learning another language?

Thea: If you are taking a child-centered approach, then it will be led by whatever topic, toys or activities your pupils are interested in at any given moment in time. Language learning and teaching should be embedded into your learning context.

Nadine: For example, on our PowerLanguage Platform, we have developed a dossier linked to Sea Animals in which, through simple activities, we introduce names of sea creatures and simple information.

(Nadine presents an extract from an animation.)

Richard: What we have done in this animation is to make links to the language objectives of our Early Years/Nursery planners.

(Richard shows an Early Years/Nursery planners.)

You can see some of the objectives here in the first of our nursery planners - such as greetings & introductions, numbers 1-10 or colours - are connected to the objectives of the Sea Animals resources.

Nadine: Yes, in this dossier we are using colours for our different sea creatures, we are counting the number of legs of fins, etc. so you can recycle and practise all your language objectives from the planners in different learning contexts.

Thea: Then we suggest that you maybe link this work to other areas of the curriculum and activities that you might normally do, such as arts and craft activities for instance: you can make some octopuses out of paper plates in order to revise numbers by counting the legs of an octopus. Get your learners to walk around the room with paper plates on their faces – used as masks - and ask them to greet each other in the target language...

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Richard: In the initial stages of language learning, we know that the main focus should be on listening skills - children need to hear the words often before being able to say them or even find the confidence to do so.

Nadine: The teacher plays a key role here in introducing the vocabulary & language orally - children will then be able to repeat it back.

Thea: Yes, and this is the ideal time to have some fun by using different voices, tempos, whispering or shouting when saying words. Challenge your learners to copy you and make up their own. The sillier the better!

(They play the "silly voice game".)

Richard: Here we are repeating these words without even realising we are saying words in a different language, which is the strength of this game!

Nadine: You might also want to associate a word or phrase with a mime, or ask your learners to come up with their own mimes for words, even abstract words such as colours or numbers, as moving their bodies might help some children learn the words.

(They play a miming game with numbers, linked to the sounds the numbers make.)

Richard: And once you have introduced the idea of mimes (or pictures) for words, you can play games such as charades, Simon Says or even Pictionary!

Thea: It also means the learners can give a physical rather than a verbal response which may be easier at an early age for some who are less confident, as well as being more inclusive.

Nadine: Another great simple game you can play to practise listening skills and for your learners to show their understanding is asking them to point at (Montrez) or touch (Touchez) objects, or even build things (from Lego for instance). This works particularly well with colours and numbers.

Thea: Another way to integrate languages into Early Years is to focus on songs, as nursery rhymes are an important element of language learning in the mother tongue, particularly for babies and toddlers. Most children are therefore used to hearing and even singing songs.

Richard: So what we did on the PowerLanguage platform is we selected famous nursery

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rhymes that children in France would learn at school. Why don't you play these nursery rhymes and get your learners to sing, dance or play games such as "pass the bag" or "musical statues". Have fun with songs!

Nadine: We can also have fun with stories! Listening to stories is a key element of Literacy in nursery and the first few years of school. On the the PowerLanguage platform, we have adapted some famous stories such as Goldilocks for instance, for you to read aloud and for your pupils to simply enjoy listening to. We also included the sound files if you don't feel confident to read the story yourself.

Thea: Taking language learning outside reminds practitioners and learners that languages are not limited to activities in the classroom.

Richard: On PowerLanguage for Schools, you will find a series of resources linked to outdoor learning such as The 5 senses or traditional playground games, to focus on consolidating key vocabulary.

Nadine: We suggest that you use well know simple games such as Duck duck duck goose, which can become bonjour bonjour au revoir, or What's the time Mr Wolf (Quelle heure est-il M Le Loup?), which is a great one to revise numbers. Use games that the children already know the rules of.

Thea: You can also combine language learning with simple PE activities such as ones which develop hand-eye coordination. Use a ball to roll or throw to someone whilst saying a word on a set topic, with learners either repeating the word or changing the word, or ask a question which the learners have to provide an answer to.
(They play the game.)

Richard: A scavenger hunt in the autumn is a perfect way to revise colours and think about seasons and leaves falling.

Nadine: At Halloween make magic potions using leaves, grass etc. and add food colouring to revise colours.

Thea: Once you have taught your children some words in another language, it's great to try and embed them in daily routines. For example: greeting children in another language is a good way to start the day, or try an emotional check in using thumbs up & down.

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Remember that learners can use mime, gesture and facial expression to show they understand a question.

Richard: What I like to use with nursery learners is little hand puppets, but make sure they only speak in the target language!

(The puppets have a conversation.)

Nadine: At snack or lunch time, you could get your pupils to ask for which fruit or how many pieces of fruit they would like in the target language (Je voudrais...)

Thea: In conclusion, language learning can and should be fun and appeal to all learners if we can teach it in a way that is playful and active.

Richard: Let's use the toys, games and materials that your learners normally play with in your school to create a learning and teaching environment that is appealing and familiar to them.

Nadine: Your young learners have an amazing capacity for discerning and repeating any kind of sounds in any language. Use the sound files and instructions on our list of games, follow our planners for nursery schools to guide you and to give you ideas to make the learning and teaching fun!

Thea: Now it's time for you to have a go!