

Chapter 5

TEACHING EFL TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Introduction

Worldwide there are more and more people from non-English speaking background countries wishing to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is due to globalisation where there is an increasing and widespread demand for English to be used as the main foreign language for communication, particularly in business, but also for educational purposes. In response to this, many public and private international education institutions and schools around the world have begun to focus their attention on teaching English. As a result many teachers from countries where English is the national language, such as Australia, are being employed as EFL teachers. Although teachers from English speaking countries may be familiar with teaching English as a Second Language or as an additional language or dialect (ESL/EALD) (a process that has been described in Chapters 2 and 3), EFL teaching though similar, is also different in some ways. In EFL settings learners only receive a few hours of instruction in English, while in most ESL settings the whole instruction is in English. Moreover, EFL learners have little opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, while ESL learners are exposed to English on a daily basis and outside the classroom. These differences are one focus of this chapter. There are also particular needs to be addressed when the learners are children. These are the other focuses of this chapter which outlines teaching young learners in EFL settings.

In this chapter we begin by exploring some of the differences between EFL settings and other language learning contexts. We follow this with an explanation about young learners, and we continue by focusing on the role and main concerns for EFL teachers. In this chapter, because of their utility in EFL classrooms, we also focus on collaborative tasks, providing a number of examples of these and other on-line resources that EFL teachers can use. Given the context of EFL teaching we also describe the potential role of the L1 in the classroom. In addition, we look at young learners' perspectives about EFL learning. Finally, we discuss assessment practices and resources related to this part of our teaching.

EFL settings

One of the key differences between learning English in a second (or additional) language setting and learning it in a foreign language context is that the learners do not have the same opportunity

to encounter and to interact in English, especially outside the classroom. What this means is that EFL learners cannot practice English in the same ways or to the same extent as do EAL/D learners. However, we need to acknowledge that there is now a greater level of access to English input via TV shows, videos, podcasts and books, many of which are available on the Internet. These are resources that EFL teachers should use and we also discuss this later in this chapter. However, even though such exposure to a foreign language can assist young language learners (Enever, 2011), it is still not the same as being able to regularly interact in the target language (Note: we use the word interact because as we discussed in Chapter 1 we believe just being exposed to input – hearing it spoken or seeing it written - is not sufficient on its own).

Because of this lack of opportunity for interaction you will find many EFL learners who, despite a long term exposure to English, do not necessarily have high levels of proficiency in that language. It is for this reason that many scholars now argue that it is not just the amount of English instruction that is important, it is the quality of the input and interaction that determines language learning achievement (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2007; Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011). For example, where children have parents who know and use an additional language – such as English – this will have a positive impact on their language learning. Also, by using the target language with family members, children will gain confidence in interacting with others. They may also be better equipped to notice when that language is being used in their wider community (Enever, 2011). However, not all children are in such a fortunate position and so the task of supporting their students largely rests with EFL teachers. Given how important this is, it is clear that these teachers have a key role to play. They need to create situations for learners to hear, see, read and write English, and to provide the type of model of English that will support their learners' English acquisition. This is something we will return to later in this chapter.

One of the main difficulties for EFL teachers of young learners is that in many countries English is not the language of instruction in schools. English is just one other subject in an often crowded curriculum. This means that their learners will receive only a few hours of instruction in English – somewhere between three and five hours per week, depending on the school and program (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011; Edelenbos, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2007). This presents considerable challenges for teachers and learners alike. In this chapter we will examine some ways to best utilise this time and also to maximise the benefits of the teaching and learning that does occur in EFL contexts.

Case study

Sophie is 6 years old and has recently started primary school in France. When she was in pre-school English was not part of the formal curriculum, but her teacher taught the class some songs in English, and she enjoyed this very much.

This year, however, Sophie's English language instruction is more formal. She participates in an English class every week and will do so for the whole school year. Initially Sophie was excited about the opportunity to learn new English songs, but she has been disappointed because her English teacher mostly focuses on teaching the class grammar and vocabulary, and like most of her peers, Sophie does not really enjoy this. Fortunately, the teacher knows how much they enjoy singing and playing different games so sometimes she complements her more formal teaching approach with some fun interactional activities. These activities include singing, and doing simple barrier-games. (Note: We describe different types of barrier games later in this chapter).

Young EFL learners

It is not uncommon to hear people say things like “children do so well learning another language” and, as we indicated in Chapter 1 of this book, young L2 learners do have some advantages. They have particular characteristics, such as the plasticity of their brains, and ways of doing things – such as learning through play and learning implicitly - that can contribute to their successful L2 learning (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008; Bialystok & Miller, 1999; Birdsong, 2005; Jia & Aaronson, 2003). Previous research actually suggests that the earlier we begin learning another language, the better (e.g., Long, 1990, 2013). This recommendation has been taken up in places such as Europe and parts of Asia where many children have begun learning a foreign language, usually English, by the age of nine. In fact, in some schools foreign languages are even being introduced to pre-school learners (Enever, 2011).

However, whilst age is one important factor for language learning success, the teaching practices and the learning programs that are used are also crucial factors (Nikolov, 2000; Singleton, 2014). In the case study above we can see how Sophie’s enjoyment for English language learning diminishes because of the formal approach that is used once she commences primary school. Although the teacher attempts to make the classes more motivating by using more engaging activities, these are supplementary rather than being the core approach. It is important that EFL teachers need to carefully consider what they do and how best to suit the needs of their young learners.

Focus question

Given that there are only a few hours available for teaching English in the EFL classroom, and taking into account what you have read in the previous chapters, what aspects of the language do you think are the most important for young EFL students to learn first?

The EFL teacher

As we have indicated, teachers play a crucial role in the process of learning. This is true in all subject areas, but it is particularly the case in EFL settings as they are the main source of input for the learners and also create those circumstances that we know facilitate language learning (i.e., opportunities to interact, to produce output, and to get feedback on their attempts). The EFL context means that the quality of the teaching significantly impacts on the learning that occurs in the classroom. Consider for the following case studies as an example of this:

Case studies of two teachers' results

At a Spanish school there are two different groups of English learners. All began learning English at the same age (5 years old). Group A is older – they are in grade 6 (11-12 years old), whereas Group B is in grade 3 (8-9 years old). Both groups of students have received 3 hours of instruction in English per week since they were aged 5, but of course Group A has received 3 years more instruction.

The teacher of group A obtained his degree in English Studies from a Spanish University twenty-two years ago. During his final year of university he studied in the UK, but he has never worked in any English speaking country ever again as he obtained a permanent position at the school shortly after he graduated. Over the years he has holidayed briefly for a few times in several English-speaking countries with his Spanish speaking wife. His colleagues describe him as being 'unmotivated' as he does not participate in any professional development related to teaching, nor does he make any formal attempts to work on this English proficiency. Furthermore, his teaching practices have remained unchanged over the years.

The teacher of Group B has not taught for as long as Teacher A. She received a degree in English Studies from a university in Spain 5 years ago, and worked in the USA as a teacher for a year after graduating. Since the beginning of her university studies, she has been travelling every summer to the UK and Ireland as a coordinator of study abroad programmes for children aged between 12 to 18 years. At the moment, as well as teaching, she is also working on her M.A. in Translation Studies. She is constantly working to improve her English proficiency, making use of any formal

and informal opportunities to practice. She also works hard to select or to design teaching activities that engage her students productively in using English class.

At the end of the academic year the school carried out an English assessment test for these two groups. Despite Group A having three more years of exposure in English than Group B, the result was that the proficiency level of the two groups was the same: low-intermediate.

Why do you think that they have achieved the same level of proficiency in English despite the different amount of instruction they had received? Do you think it is only the impact of the teachers or are there other factors that might have influenced this result?

Clearly teachers' experience and personal language proficiency can bring a lot to the task of teaching EFL because overall they are responsible for what happens in the classroom (Butler, 2004). Also the way they create learning opportunities will help (or sadly sometimes hinder) their learners to maintain a positive attitude towards the language they are learning. What they do in class may also support EFL children's willingness to communicate and to keep their motivation high. This is achieved by creating lessons that are enjoyable and challenging, but also ones that maintain the children's interest. It is not surprising that some see EFL teachers as being more like caretakers than educators (Nikolov, 2008; Nikolov & Milhaljević Djigunović, 2011). However, it is important to acknowledge that teaching expectations and methods differ according to the context. For example, in some countries what happens in public primary schools will be very different from what is done in private language centres. In some contexts EFL teachers will need to strictly follow the national curriculum, they may also be expected to teach in particular ways and to focus on particular aspects. In some settings teachers may have to deal with children whose behaviour is very disruptive. In some schools the majority of English teachers are native speakers, whereas in other contexts the proficiency of the English teachers may be quite low. In addition, what the learners bring to the context may also differ quite significantly and together all these factors will affect the outcomes.

Regardless of context, foreign language learning (like all learning), is socially constructed. EFL learners need to interact with other more able language users in order to develop their language proficiency. Because of the context of EFL learning where there is a diminished opportunity for interaction with others outside the classroom, the teacher takes the role of being the more expert language user. The teacher also has the main responsibility for scaffolding the children's language use (as we described in Chapter 1) although, as we will show later in this chapter, peer interaction is also a useful context for scaffolding and for other aspects of interaction that support language learning.

As we have indicated, however, in most EFL contexts teaching and learning need to occur in just a few short hours. It is for this reason that some schools have turned to alternative approaches to instruction, such as bilingual, immersion or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approaches (see Chapter 7 for a description of the latter approach). Yet, using alternative approaches to traditional EFL teaching is not always possible, nor supported for various reasons. One issue related to this and one that has been identified in various settings is that not all EFL teachers have an adequate level of English proficiency (Enever, 2011; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Johnstone, 2009). As we mentioned earlier this has led to the growing demand for overseas teachers who have English as their L1. A further problem is the lack of training in language education many teachers receive. Together this means that there are insufficient well-trained and highly proficient language professionals for all the schools wishing to teach English to their students (Enever, 2011). Even the regulations used for the selection of EFL teachers (i.e., according to their English proficiency) is somewhat inconsistent. In some schools teachers are required to have proficiency at an appropriate level (C1) as encompassed within the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)** (Council of Europe, 2001). However, even this is changeable and other schools accept a lower level (e.g., a B1 level). In other countries other measures are used to determine if someone is suitable for teaching English (e.g., completing a degree with an English major – regardless of proficiency level).

The challenge for EFL teachers is that they should not only be proficient in the language they are teaching, but also in the students' L1 (Nikolov & Milhaljević Djigunović, 2011). To ensure their program is relevant and at a cognitive level appropriate for their students, EFL teachers also need to be familiar with the content and methodology of the general teaching program, as well as being expert in language teaching methodology (Nikolov & Milhaljević Djigunović, 2011). EFL teachers face additional challenges, too, such as limited resources, especially in regional and remote areas (Enever, 2011). This requires teachers to be somewhat creative in the activities they design for their learners. Despite these obstacles, recent research suggests there is the potential in EFL classes to employ the type of collaborative tasks that are known to promote language learning, even when the learners are young. We discuss these next.

Collaborative tasks for EFL teaching

In Chapter 2 we saw how, over the last 20 years or so, language teaching has moved from a communicative approach to one that is task-based (i.e., TBLT). TBLT is a meaning-focused methodology in which students are meant to produce language while engaging in real-world activities or tasks (Skehan, 1998). A key part of this methodology involves the use of **collaborative**

tasks which are those pedagogical activities requiring learners to use language meaningfully to achieve a particular goal (Bygate et al., 2001, p.11). Although the uptake of this approach in many EFL contexts has lagged behind what has happened in EAL/D classes, because tasks provide learners with many opportunities for language learning (e.g., Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; Butler & Zeng, 2014, 2015; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015; Pinter, 2006) this is beginning to change. Today many teachers are coming to recognise that collaborative tasks are especially beneficial in EFL classrooms.

As examples of collaborative tasks have already been described in Chapter 2, in this chapter we will focus on how these tasks can help EFL learners and what things teachers should consider if they are to use them for their teaching. To begin here is a list of five different types of tasks that have been classified according to who holds and who seeks the information during the interactional exchanges (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993, pp. 20-23).

Types of collaborative tasks

Jigsaw task	Each participant has part of the information necessary to complete the task. In order to complete the task, the two participants have to exchange this information, and they have to reach a single outcome.
Information-gap task	In this task only one participant holds the information necessary to complete the task, and the other participant requests the information from the information holder. This task also requires a single outcome.
Problem-solving task	It is oriented towards a single outcome, but information does not need to be exchanged to complete the task.
Decision-making task	Although this task is oriented towards a single outcome, different solutions are also acceptable, but again an exchange of information is not necessary in order to complete the task.
Opinion-exchange task	Learners should engage in discussion and the exchange of ideas, but once more an exchange of information is not necessary and there is not one single outcome.

Generally jigsaw and information-gap tasks (or barrier games) have been claimed to be more useful for L2 learning. This is because they encourage learners to engage in meaningful communication, providing more opportunities for learners to provide and to receive input, output and feedback.

Example of an information-gap task

This activity is taken from Azkarai and Imaz Agirre (2016) where children work in pairs on a guessing game. This activity is a one-way repeated information-gap task because the role of the 'information seeker' and 'information holder' changes. First, one member of the pair is the 'information holder' and receives a card with the picture of an object on it and the other learner has to guess what the object is. Once the 'information seeker' has correctly guessed the item on the card the roles are reversed.

This activity is ideal for young EFL learners - they consider it a game rather than a task and have fun playing it with friends. In this sense, the guessing game keeps learners' motivation high and provides them with a wide array of opportunities to focus on language. Here there is an example of the type of language that EFL learners aged 9-10 produced as they completed this task (example taken from Azkarai and Imaz Agirre's (2016) database).

<i>Student A</i>	<i>Student B</i>
1 It does have-it does an animal?	
2	Yes, is an animal.
3 Eh... eh... what he has?	
4	Eh... A tail. He has a tail. But the tail is <i>redonda, con giros</i> [round, curly].
5 Ah... eh... is-what color is?	
6	Eh... pink.
7 Pink?	
8	Yes.
9 Who...	
10	<i>Pero tienes que preguntar todas. ¡Corre, pregunta todas, si la sabes! ¡Pregunta!</i> [But you have to ask all of them. Come on, ask all of them, you already know them! Ask!]
11 What... how many <i>patas</i> [legs] he has?	
12	Four.
13 Eh... eh... how many, eh... where he lives?	
14	In farmer.
15 In a farm?	
16	Yes.
17 Eh... eh... why? Why he lives in there?	
18	What?
19 Why he lives in there?	
20	Because the farmer eh... there <i>alimented</i> [feed] and there eh... <i>matar</i> [kill].
21 Ok.	
22	<i>Matar</i> [Kill] to...
23 Kill.	
24	...to have-to has ham.
25 When...	

26		<i>¿Me has preguntado todas?</i> [Did you ask me all of them?]
27	No.	
28		<i>¡Pues pregunta! Que creo que ya lo sabrás, seguramente.</i> [Then ask! Although I bet you already know it.]
29	How it can-it has-it has, eh... <i>lana</i> [wool]?	
30		What?
31	<u><i>Lan</i></u> [<i>wool</i>]?	
32		<i>¿Qué? ¿Lana?</i> [What? Wool?]
33	Yes.	
34		No.
35	What-what animal die to have ham. Ham. Ham.	
36		Ham. Eh... <i>pavo</i> [turkey].
37	What?	
38		<i>Pavo</i> [turkey].
39	No!	
40		Pig! A pig!
41	Yes!	

You can see from this transcript how this information-gap task promotes meaningful use of language: it allowed the learners to get input from each other (e.g., lines 14-15), to push their own output (e.g., lines 35-40) and to provide and to receive feedback. The task also provided opportunities for scaffolding (e.g., lines 17-23) allowing learners to be able to achieve more together than could on their own.

Clearly collaborative tasks are very beneficial. Whilst there are now lots of commercial products available, EFL teachers can also use practical resources -tasks based in everyday activities- to create their own. For example, menus or recipes can be used for information-gap tasks. Matrix activities (shown below) can be easily constructed as either information-gap or jigsaw tasks and be used by learners to explore a variety of concepts (e.g., animals and their characteristics, numbers and colours, rooms and furniture, people and their clothing, etc.). Picture placement tasks can be used for mathematics or science concepts (e.g., shapes and angles, living and non-living things). In fact, almost all skills and content from different subject areas can be modified as collaboration tasks (e.g., measuring and graphing activities from mathematics, mapping and timeline activities from social sciences, arranging pictures showing the life cycle of different plants and animals from science). How this might be done with a matrix activity and science concepts is demonstrated below:

Example of a matrix activity

This task takes place after a science lesson. Using the same content that was covered in that class the EFL teacher makes a blank matrix with the animal names in English across the top and questions down the left hand side. The children can use the resources from their science lesson to help them as they take turns asking questions about the animals. They are encouraged to use English as they do this task (examples of their responses are shown in italics).

	Horse	Chicken	Fish	Frog	Bee	Worm
How many legs?	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>
How do they move?	<i>Walk, gallop, trot</i>	<i>Walk and fly</i>	<i>Swim</i>	<i>Jump</i>	<i>Walk and fly</i>	<i>Wriggle</i>
What body covering	<i>Skin and hair</i>	<i>Skin and feathers</i>	<i>Scales</i>	<i>Skin</i>	<i>?</i>	
How are they born	<i>Born live</i>	<i>Eggs</i>	<i>Eggs</i>			
What do they eat?	<i>Hay</i>					

Can you think of other content that you might use for such a matrix activity?

For EFL teachers designing appropriate and useful tasks is only limited by their imagination. However, there are a number of important criteria that teachers should keep in mind when designing or selecting tasks. To begin, tasks need to be relevant and useful for the learners. It is also necessary to keep in mind the abilities of young learners – tasks should be challenging, but not so difficult that the children will feel uncomfortable or want to give up. Tasks should be fun and of the type that allow children to be active and communicative. Some scholars argue that tasks also need to be selected to promote young children's imagination (Butler, Someya, & Fukuhara, 2014). They should also include content that meets the learners' needs and understanding (including of the target language, but also the content), interests and abilities. For example, if there is a forthcoming event on the school calendar such as Easter, then teachers may select tasks that include content that reflects this. In this way, they can build upon their students' conceptual understanding in their first language to develop the relevant language form in their second. The information-gap task we described above met these requirements in the way it resembled an everyday guessing game and

included familiar things. The matrix activity was helpful because it reinforced the concepts learnt in an L1 science lesson and recycled these ideas as part of an EFL lesson.

Not only can content be recycled for use in EFL lessons, the tasks themselves can be repeated as a way of providing learners with lots of communicative practice. Whilst we may feel doing the same thing over and over again is boring, look at how children play: they often play with the same toys time and time again and repeat the same actions using similar words and phrases when they do so. Similarly repeating tasks in language classes can be fun for children. In fact, research has found that **task repetition** increases learner motivation (Sample & Michel, 2014) and engagement (García Mayo & Imaz Agirre, 2016). Repeating tasks can also increase children's confidence to use the target language (Pinter, 2007; Sample & Michel, 2014). It can help them to produce language that is more complex and/or accurate and/or fluent (Sample & Michel, 2014). Task repetition has also been found to help learners improve their understanding of the language (Shintani, 2012, 2014). Most importantly, repeating tasks has been found to result in the type of interaction that promotes language learning (Azkarai & Oliver, 2016; Shintani, 2012, 2014).

The key to the successful use of tasks is how they are introduced and then implemented as part of regular EFL lessons. For example, young learners may need extra support, particularly in the initial stages. They may require modelling of how to do the tasks and guidance about the type of language that can be used. Tasks might initially be demonstrated as a whole class activity and then gradually independent pair and group work can be introduced. For very young learners (who have short attention spans) the tasks will need to be of a short duration. It is also important that the EFL teacher provides ground rules for their students to follow, such as listening carefully, respecting each other's opinions, taking turns and working together collaboratively. And as useful as tasks are, to maintain the interest of child EFL learners, teachers will need to supplement them with other activities such as games and songs (Enever, 2011).

EFL teachers may notice that the age of the learner will make a difference to what happens when tasks are used (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016). For example, very young children engage differently with tasks than those who are slightly older. Recent research undertaken in EFL classes in Spain, for instance, has shown how the opportunities for feedback during collaborative work seems to depend on whether the learners are aged below or above the age of 10 (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2016; García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015). This might occur because around the age of 10 there is a change in the children's cognitive development and so the skills or attitudes they display towards certain activities also change. And it is not just in Spanish classes, Butler et al. (2014) found that younger and older EFL children in Japan also exhibited different behaviours. They found that whilst those 10 years and older still happily engaged in tasks as if playing games, just as

younger children do, the way they communicated was different. In Hungary, Pinter (2007) proposed that although 10-year-olds have the same ability as adults to communicate, they also have many things in common with younger learners, such as being less likely to clarify what is said to them. Therefore, as with many aspects of teaching, it will also be necessary to adapt tasks according to the age of those who will be using them.

Such a long list of things to consider may make it difficult for teachers to choose and then use collaborative tasks. It might be especially difficult for those with limited access to resources. Other teachers may find it difficult to utilise tasks because they feel the pressure of having to follow a prescribed syllabus or having to use a set text. This may require a strong rationale for why particular tasks have been chosen and some careful negotiation with the school leadership about task implementation. It might also mean that **a task-supported approach** rather than a task-based approach will need to be used in these contexts (see Li, Ellis, & Zhu, 2016). However, we maintain it is worth the effort - as we have described already, there is considerable empirical support for the use of tasks as they promote the type of language learners need, particularly for use outside the classroom (Enever, 2011).

Online resources for EFL teaching

As we indicated earlier, computer and Internet resources offer EFL teachers other opportunities to promote language learning among young EFL learners (Butler et al., 2014), including the use of online tasks. Using resources for this purpose – that is using **computer assisted language learning** (CALL) is now acknowledged to be suitable for all aged learners, including young EFL students. Some of the benefits of online resources are that they provide a lot of visual information which helps to maintain learners' attention as well as their motivation. They can also be readily repeated and provide learners with abundant feedback. However, just as non-online materials can vary considerably, not all CALL materials promote language learning equally. Teachers need to monitor and select tasks with care (Butler et al., 2014). With this caveat in mind, there are still enormous opportunities for young learners to learn from these resources, some of which we list below:

Internet resources for the teacher

Links offering materials (e.g., tasks, games, assessment tools) for English teachers

- British Council: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-kids>
- Cambridge English: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/>
- ISL Collective: <https://en.islcollective.com/>
- Internet TESL Journal: <http://iteslj.org/games/>

- American English - United States Department of State: <https://americanenglish.state.gov/>
IRIS Digital Repository (Marsden, Mackey, & Plonsky, 2016)

- <https://www.iris-database.org/>

This platform provides researchers and teachers with the opportunity to upload materials that have been published, in order to share it with other individuals, as well as to download materials for use. The platform includes materials involving research with learners in different settings and ages, but anyone can browse the activities and the setting and age of the learners they have been used with.

Smartphone apps

- Duolingo: <https://en.duolingo.com/>

- Memrise: <https://www.memrise.com/>

- Babbel: <https://uk.babbel.com/>

Usually these apps are meant for adults, but with the supervision and guidance of the EFL teacher, young learners might also make a good use of them.

The use of the L1 in the EFL classroom

One other important issue particularly relevant to EFL settings is the use of learners' L1. Teachers worry that learners will frequently lapse into their L1 and this is one of the key criticisms of task based (and previously communicative) approaches. A common belief is that if learners use their L1 they will not spend enough time learning the target language. Not so long ago allowing students to switch to their home language was actively discouraged. However, research has since shown that it can actually have some positive benefits. It can serve to help learners understand and complete the activity and help maintain their interest in it (Alley, 2005; Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks & Donato, 1994). It can also be helpful to ensure that learners understand the task instructions (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2011). And rather being a distraction to the learning, when learners switch to the L1 they mostly do so to talk about how to do the task or are actually using it within the task (Moore, 2013, p. 243), as shown in the example above and illustrated in the following vignette:

A case study of L1 use

In a Spanish school, a 5th grade EFL teacher asks the classroom to carry out a task in pairs. It is a picture story task where the pairs build up a story based on the different pictures they each have. When Miguel and Lidia work together, they struggle with some of the vocabulary related to their pictures. They try a range of different English words when they encounter such a

problem, but their communication breaks down to such an extent they cannot do the task at all. They decide to use their L1 (Spanish) to overcome the problem. Once they resolve the issue, they are able to go on and finish the task in English.

What are your thoughts about using the L1 in the L2 classroom?

What are some other strategies the EFL teacher might use to overcome such problems?

Although research of L1 use by young EFL learners is less extensive than with older learners, current findings do indicate that it serves a range of purposes and generally is quite useful (e.g., Pinter, 2007; Shintani, 2012, 2014; Azkarai & García Mayo, 2016). What's more, these studies have shown that young learners do not overuse their L1 and that it does assist them in the process of EFL learning, as shown in the example above. Of course, EFL teachers will still need to consider how they best balance the use of the L1 in the classroom with optimising target language learning, but they can do so in the knowledge that L1 use can have a positive role to play.

The role of children in the EFL classroom

Focus question

Do you consider your students' opinions when teaching English to them?

Over the last few decades the area of **learner autonomy** (or at least increased learner responsibility) has become a pedagogical focus, especially for adult language learners. It is an approach included in our classrooms because it is not possible to teach our students everything they need in order to be proficient foreign language users. Therefore, part of our EFL teaching should include a 'learning how to learn' component – helping them to develop strategies so they can continue learning independently outside the classroom.

Many teachers of younger learners feel their students do not have the cognitive competence or social maturity to work in ways where they develop this type of autonomy. It is less likely for teachers of young learners to allow their students to make decisions about how and what they are taught (Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2010; Kellett, 2010). Yet children can provide teachers (and researchers for that matter) with a different perspective about their learning and about the classroom setting they are in (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2014; Pinter, Kuchah, & Smith, 2013). Taking account of these perspectives is vital, not only for helping young learners to develop autonomy, but also because it can help to counter the negative attitudes towards language learning that many school students develop. We suggest asking learners about what they think about the

things that are happening in the EFL classroom and their opinion about the activities that they might do. From our own teaching experience, even young learners are more aware of what they need and how best to teach these things than we might otherwise give them credit for. Shifting some of the responsibility to young learners, particularly getting their feedback, is supported by research. For example, Hattie (2012) has found that in mainstream classes, a two-way type of feedback (i.e., from teachers to students and students to teachers) can make strong contributions to positive student learning experiences and the outcomes. How outcomes are measured, that is how learning is assessed, is an area of importance and one we turn to next.

Assessment in the EFL young classroom

Assessment is an essential part of teaching, yet currently many EFL teachers rely solely on the results of tests to understand how well their students have learnt (Davison & Leoung, 2009; McKay, 2006; Nikolov, 2016). Part of the difficulty is that there has been much less research and development about assessing foreign languages for young learners (Nikolov, 2016). Yet, as we have indicated above, positive feedback (underpinned by assessment) is a crucial part of good teaching.

Feedback based on well-structured assessment can assist children's language development. In turn, it can serve to further support their motivation. However, the key is setting up assessment methods that are both achievable and not cumbersome, allowing teachers to work efficiently (Nikolov & Milhaljević Djigunović, 2011) and in ways where the assessment is informative to both teachers and students. Furthermore, assessment doesn't have to be a formal (or even a standardised) test, it can be part of everyday classroom practices. For example, if a task-based approach is used, teachers can assess whether or not the learners were able to successfully complete the task, noting from their observations what language was used and what the students struggled with (in terms of language and content). In this way assessment may be achieved through simple checklists and anecdotal notes recorded on the teachers' lesson plans.

There is also a body of evidence showing the benefits of peer-assessment (Butler & Zeng, 2014, 2015; Pinter, 2006) and even self-assessment. Again although some teachers may be sceptical, peer-assessment is possible even with young EFL learners. As with collaborative tasks, the introduction of this approach needs to be staged so that learners are gradually introduced to the practice. It is also necessary for it to be constructed in a way that young learners can easily do it. For example, after a lesson or series of lessons about a particular topic, students respond in writing – in words, phrases or sentences depending on ability - to these questions: “What was I good at?”, “What do I need to work on?”, “What I would like to do next?”.

In addition, portfolios can be used both as a beneficial assessment practice (Nikolov, 2016), and also as a way to provide information to students and their parents about what has been achieved. Although collating the material for these requires some extra work (Little, 2007), it is a concrete way to demonstrate learner progress (Venn, 2000). Portfolio-assessment can be combined with the self-evaluation method outlined above, and in this way helps them to reflect on their own learning process. As Butler and Lee (2010, p. 25) suggest doing this can “help students understand the goals of tasks, reflect on what they have achieved with reference to such goals, and figure out what it will take to finally reach their goals”.

As well as these teacher developed and class based assessments, there are also several online resources that can be used:

- Cambridge Young Learners English Tests: www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/young-learners
- City & Guilds ESOL for Young Learners: www.cityandguilds.com
- Pearson Test of English Young Learners: www.pearsonpte.com/PTEYoungLearners
- TOEFL Primary: www.ets.org/toefl_primary

The levels covered in the majority of these tests are A1 and A2 of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). These tests encompass aural, oral and literacy skills and offer a general overview of learners' capability in EFL overall. However, there is little research on the potential benefits of these tests for the classroom and how they may help (or not!) to develop learner language proficiency (see Beningno & de Jong, 2016; Hsieh, 2016; Papp & Walczak, 2016).

Conclusion

As we indicated, one of the main difficulties for EFL programs is the learners' low exposure to the target language and the limited time devoted to teaching the language. As we suggested at the beginning of this chapter, to address this CLIL programs are increasingly being used (again see Chapter 7). EFL teachers in some contexts may also struggle because of their limited access to necessary materials and resources. When available, technology does provide some useful resources to overcome these practical issues and, as we described at length, using collaborative tasks is perhaps one of the more effective ways to address the needs of young EFL learners. However, it is recommendable to seek up to date materials, as resources are rapidly developing. There are also various international projects and exchange programs that provide additional opportunities for EFL teachers and their learners (Enever, 2011). Finally, the following resources may also be helpful to EFL teachers:

Useful handbooks for EFL teachers

This is a short selection of handbooks for teachers of foreign languages to young learners.

- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

In this book Cameron presents theoretical and practical principles about teaching languages to young learners.

- Enever, J. (Ed.). (2011). *ELLiE. Early language learning in Europe*. London, UK: British Council.

This is a project carried out by several researchers in Europe in different countries where English is taught as a foreign language. The project presents experimental data and resources for teachers, as well as young learners' attitudes towards foreign language learning.

- Nikolov, M., Mihaljević Djigunović, J., Mattheoudakis, M., Lundberg, G., & Flanagan, T. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching modern languages to young learners: Teachers, curricula and materials*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

This edited book is a collection of studies that focuses on language teachers of primary schools, on curricula and syllabi and on teaching materials and different teaching methodologies.

- Rich, S. (2014). *International perspectives on teaching English to young learners*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

This edited volume presents a collection of studies that focus on research and practice of teaching English to young learners.

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