



## TEACHING VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Annotation:** *The thesis Teaching vocabulary to young learners deals with the need of a teacher to know his or her learners and to understand their needs and problems. Other issue mentioned in the thesis is the question of motivation and including fun and games into the teaching process. The last issue the thesis deals with is the usage of different methods and approaches for teaching young learners.*

**Key words:** *Young learner, motivation, vocabulary, approach, method, game, fun.*

### INTRODUCTION

“Why? What is it good for? Is it good for them at all? Do they really need it? Is it not only a useless worry? Why do we have to make them learn something more than what they really need and have to? How much hope shall we place in it? “ These are the most frequent questions I have been thinking about. I have discussed them with many pupils, teachers and parents. Reactions and opinions were, of course, different. I have been teaching English for eleven years now – seven years at a language school here in Brno, the rest at two primary schools also in Brno. I have to admit that at the beginning I doubted about any acquisition for young learners and many arguments seemed cogent to me. During the time I began to realize chances and occasions that English language can offer to children and I started to be a big fan of teaching English to young learners. I ran against a lot of troubles that I would like to share in my final thesis and also I would like to share some ideas for teaching vocabulary to young learners. At the beginning during the discussions with my colleagues we found out that some kind of conception was needed, next we pointed out that there were missing good textbooks or materials, also didactic aids and methodology books. Frequent complain of many teachers is that it is extremely difficult to teach children that seem to lack the basic talent for learning languages. Therefore I would like to refer to the possibilities which teaching a foreign language to young learners brings. The aim of this work is to show several ways that can be used for teaching vocabulary to young learners. I<sup>4</sup> would like to show why and how teaching vocabulary to young learners can be more efficient. I divided my thesis into the theoretical and the practical part – the practical part follows the theoretical part. In the theoretical part I will introduce the aim of this thesis,

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<sup>4</sup> 1. BRUMFIT, Christopher; MOON, Jayne; TONGUE, Ray: Teaching English to Children. From Practice to Principle. Longman Group Essex, 1995. 309 s. ISBN0-17-556889-8.

2. DOFF, Adrian. Teach English: A training course for teachers. Cambridge University Press, 1988. 345 s. ISBN 0- 18-34232-9.



then I will try to describe who is a young learner. In the next chapter I will focus on what is vocabulary and how it is learned and also the ways how vocabulary can be presented.. In the second part of my thesis I would like to present my system of work and also different methods I use while teaching. I will enclose some materials and games that I use in 9 my lessons. In conclusion I will briefly summarize my thesis. After that follows the list of sources - books (used literature) which I used for my thesis and the appendices where I included some materials and exercises with the keys.

### Theoretical part

A young learner – who is he or she? This term covers a wide age range, this can be anybody from the age of three to the age of eighteen. There is a big difference between what a –three-year-old child can do and what a child of fifteen can do. We should consider their development too. Some children develop faster, others need more time. Teaching young learners requires the knowledge of knowing all the development differences. Understanding these differences can help me as a teacher to develop methods and a system of work that I will use in the process of teaching. Of course, it is not possible to say that every child of six will know this and that. But it is possible to pick out some characteristics which I as a teacher should know and should be aware of. I have decided to focus on young learners – age group 7-11. I have chosen this age group because I like working with young learners. From my own personal experience I have to admit that learners at this age are grateful when someone invest time in them. The results are seen quite easily and of course teachers demand this kind of satisfaction. These children still want to learn something new. When they know it, they are happy to present it and they feel more important. I remember a girl - 5th grade - who was able to “communicate” with a native speaker. Her joy was the best reward for me. It is generally known that the Czech system officially allows children to start learning a foreign language in the 4th grade. In the Czech Republic children have started learning a foreign language in the 4th grade so far. However, according to the new school curricula, which is starting to be adopted from September 2006, the children will start a year earlier and in some schools the foreign language will be introduced from the 1st grade. In the 7th grade they will have to start learning a second foreign language. In my opinion, the sooner they start, the better for them. Their brain and memory is ready for learning and most of them can learn quite well. There have been many disputes and discussions over this. I think these debates will be run over and over because nobody is able to say the exact time for beginning to learn foreign languages. From my personal experience, I achieved quite good results with kindergarten children so I do not see any problems for older learners. I think if very young learners are able to achieve good results, I think the older ones can do it too. I would like to point out some characteristics about this age group. They are happy when they can play. They love to share their experiences, they love when people pay attention to them and their talking. They are able to talk about what they are doing. They use imagination a lot. They can think, argue, discuss and they are able to interact with both children and adults. They are able to concentrate for certain time. They understand situations and through situations – they use several senses. They are able to use language skills not even realizing them. They do not realize what is fact and



what is fiction sometimes. They want to learn and are happy when they learn something, then they have to share it with somebody and they are proud that they learnt something, they can show off a little bit. Often they “teach” each other. They love to be praised for what they have done and learnt, this is very important fact to keep their <sup>5</sup>motivation. Very often they pretend they understand everything and they know everything. Halliwell states that: young children are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words already have great skill in using limited language creatively frequently learn indirectly rather than directly take great pleasure in creating fun in what they do their imagination is ready “above all take great delight in talking” (Halliwell, 1992, p 3) I do agree with Halliwell and her observations. My observations are the same as hers. These examples of characteristics I have mentioned above are great hints how to teach young learners and what kind of methods we should use. It is very important to choose the right way of teaching for these little children. The teacher definitely has to be very sensitive to the children’s needs and has to prepare the lessons well. We should avoid a stereotype, the lessons have to be creative and lively. Otherwise this could have really bad consequences for the learners’ further improvement in the language.

### Conclusion

In my final thesis, as the title prompts, I deal with the subject of teaching vocabulary to young learners. When teaching young learners, the teacher has to be strong at the knowledge but also needs to connect with the children. They need to feel the teacher likes them and wants to teach them something new. As said in the theoretical part, the results are seen easily and the learners at this age are very grateful when someone invest time in them. The teacher has to know his or her pupils. It is important to understand their needs, their expectations with which each child comes to the lessons, also ways how to motivate them and last but not least their learning style. All this the teacher is learning while working with the learners. The teachers get to know their families, their hobbies and interests and just basic information about the learners. Also, especially nowadays, we as teachers have to consider the learning disabilities too. There are more and more children with these problems and we as teachers need to help them to enjoy the lessons and help them to learn too. The teacher needs to understand their differences, their cultural and family background etc. In the Theoretical Part I have mentioned some characteristics of young learners. I wanted to show that working with them offers many possibilities and we can use many methods and approaches. During my teacher’s training I have learned that it is important to learn about their personalities and also to get to know them. Every learner is

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<sup>5</sup> 3. HALLIWELL, Susan: Teaching English in the Primary Classrooms. UK: Longman Group Essex, 1992. 169 s. ISBN-0-582-07109-7.

4. HARMER, Jeremy. The Practice of English Language Teaching. UK: Longman, 2005, 370 s. ISBN 0-582-40385-5.



different and we need to view each person individually. I also talk about vocabulary – what it is, how it can be taught, which words should be taught and ways that vocabulary can be presented. In the Practical Part, there are several lesson plans. From the theory, I tried to show how some methods and approaches can be used in the lessons while teaching young learners. I also tried to show that variety is important because young learners get bored if they do the same activities in the same way all the time. The Practical Part proved what I mentioned in the theory. I have to admit that in practice I tried out all the lesson plans and it worked well. Sometimes, some activity took longer time so the learners were assigned a homework. The focus of this thesis is the personality of young learners and teaching vocabulary to them. Testing and assessment will be the theme of my next future research.

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