

Factors influencing the effectiveness of teaching English

The article discuss the characteristics of young language learners and individual features of children in learning a foreign language. I concentrate on general characteristics of five to seven year olds and eight to ten year olds. I also try to focus the readers' attention on the children's basic development from three to six years old and from six to nine years old. I try to show what you can and cannot expect from young learners to avoid possible difficulties and mistakes in the teaching process. The detailed knowledge about children in these age groups is especially important if you want to teach them in ways that are appropriate for their stage of development.

1 Characteristics of young language learners

1.1 General features

'The period from five to ten sees dramatic changes in children, but we cannot say exactly when this happens because it is different for all individuals. The magic age seems to be around seven or eight' (Scott, Ytreberg 1999:13). Children at the age from seven to ten fall things into place and have very decided views of the adult world.

➤ General characteristics of six to seven year olds

Six to seven year olds can plan activities and use logical reasoning. They have a very short concentration and attention span. They can use their vivid imaginations and often cannot tell the difference between fact and fiction because the separating line between the imaginary world and the real world is not clear. They can talk about what they are doing and what they have done or heard. They are able to argue for something and tell you why they think what they think. 'They know that the world is governed by rules. They may not always understand the rules, but they know that they are there to be obeyed, and the rules help to nurture a feeling of security' (Scott, Ytreberg 1999:10).

In addition, they understand direct human interaction but do not often understand what adults are talking about, they understand in their own terms and do what they

think you want them to do. They are enthusiastic and positive about learning and like to learn best when they enjoy themselves but cannot make some decision about their own learning. 'Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant all times' (Scott, Ytreberg 1999:10).

➤ General characteristics of eight to nine year olds

Eight to nine year olds are complement users of their own language and they are aware of the main ruler of syntax in their mother language. They begin to make sense of the world and do not have difficulty in knowing what is fiction and what is fact. 'They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning' (Scott, Ytreberg 1999:12).

Moreover, they can tell you about what they like and do not like doing. They are able to decide for themselves what to learn and learn from other. They can work with others children and ask many questions during lessons. 'They have a developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and beginning to question the teacher's decision' (Scott, Ytreberg 1999:12).

1.2 Children's development

Wright (1987) claims that in a class children are at different stages of personal and intellectual development. According to Roth (1998), there are six areas of children's development:

- control of muscular movement
- emotions
- intelligence
- language
- sociability
- behaviour

➤ Children's basic development of six year olds

- control of muscular movement

Muscles are still developing and children have the need for physical exercise. 'Activities should be varied and should help develop large motor movements (running, jumping, etc.) and hand-eye coordination (cutting out, modelling, etc.)' (Roth 1998:8).

- emotions

Emotions are not stable, often change and become unbalanced. Children have sudden tantrums and a wish to do or have something. They feel both insecurity and unlimited power. Waiting prevents children from doing something or being successful. Activities should be varied and short.

- intelligence

Thought of children is subjective and egocentric. They are always talking about themselves. They are able to use drawing or game as a substitute of a real object.

'Activities should use toys that imitate real life (toy cars, toy food, etc.)' (Roth 1998:8).

- language

Young children clearly express themselves. Activities ought to develop writing and oral skills.

- sociability

They have mixed feelings about contacts with peers, they can be friendly and aggressive to other pupils. They are aware of their abilities and limitations. 'Teacher should favour group work to encourage sociability, sharing and concentration' (Roth 1998:9).

- behaviour

Children are often physically aggressive without a motive and take other pupil's toys. They prevent from continuous activities in order to gain attention. They are enthusiastic and eager to do something but non-systematic in ways they do things and do not often want to do required activities. They are very interested in communication to distinguish themselves from others. The teacher should give confidence pupils to communicate and cause them to agree to do suggested activity. 'Teacher should monitor aggressive

behaviour, without over-reacting' (Roth 1998:8).

➤ Children's basic development from six to nine years of age.

- control of muscular movement

Control of muscular movement is better because muscles are more resistant and stronger. You must take into mind that physical changes may generate insecurity.

- emotions

Children control emotional ambivalence, cooperate with others and interest in sexual differences. 'Teacher should be warm, well balanced and able to restore child's equilibrium . Should offer constant encouragement' (Roth 1998: 8).

- intelligence

Pupils develop knowledge of the world around them, they become more realistic, more reasonable and discover coincidence. They become more objective, too. You must choose activities which develop logic, reasoning, imagination and creativity in order to wide learners` mind.

- language

Children of six use correctly tenses and understand them at the age of eight or nine. They should do exercises that develop oral and writing skills.

- sociability

They start work with peers and at the age from seven to eight, they are able to work very simply in groups. A team gives them feeling of security and self-esteem. They can learn moral values from adults. 'With 6-9 year-olds, the teacher should be concerned with their scale of values' (Roth 1998:8).

- behaviour

Learners think that teacher knows everything and admire them. They initiate to become calmer and love reading. You should be good model for your pupils.

2 Individual features of children in learning a foreign language (MI theory)

According to Komorowska (2003), intelligence is a way of living and behaving in various situations, especially in a new or upsetting situation. If we actually want to test intelligence, we need to find out how a child acts when he or she really does not know to do. There are children with different amounts of intelligence. More intelligent children face a new problem and try many solutions, consequently, they achieve a success in learning English.

There are eight areas of intelligence according to Multiple Intelligences theory:

- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
- Math-Logic Intelligence
- Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence
- Spatial Intelligence
- Intrapersonal Intelligence
- Interpersonal Intelligence
- Naturalist Intelligence
- Musical Intelligence (internet resource: www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm).

➤ Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Learners with bodily-kinesthetic are strong in using tools, dancing, crafts, acting and athletics. They prefer body language, touching, talking, moving around. The best way of learning is touching, moving, processing knowledge through bodily sensations.

➤ Math-Logic Intelligence

Pupils who have math-logic intelligence are the best in solving problems, reasoning, patterns, math and logic. They love working with numbers, solving problems, questioning, experimenting. You can teach them by working with the abstract, patterns, categorizing or classifying.

➤ Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence

Children with verbal-linguistic intelligence are strong in writing, reading, memorizing dates, telling stories, thinking in words. They like to write, read, work at puzzles,

memorize and talk. The best ways of learning are speaking, discussing, debating, seeing and hearing words, writing and reading.

➤ Spatial Intelligence

Pupils who have spatial intelligence are the best in reading, maps, charts, drawing, mazes, puzzles, imaging, things, visualization. They want to look at pictures, create, draw, design, build and daydream. They are the best learners through drawing, colours, working with pictures and visualizing.

➤ Intrapersonal Intelligence

Learners having intrapersonal intelligence can recognize strengths and weaknesses, understand self and set goals. They want to consider, work alone and continue with interests. You can teach them by doing self-paced projects, working alone, reflecting and having space.

➤ Interpersonal Intelligence

Pupils with interpersonal intelligence have powerful abilities to organize, lead, communicate, understand others people and resolve conflicts. They love talking to people, joining groups and making friends. They successfully learn, if they cooperate, compare, interview, relate and share.

➤ Naturalist Intelligence

Children who have naturalist intelligence are strong in identifying flora and fauna, understanding nature and making distinctions. They want to be involved with nature and make distinctions. They are the best learners through working in nature, exploring things, learning about planets and natural events.

➤ Musical Intelligence

Learners with musical intelligence are able to remember melodies and rhythms, pick up sounds and sing. They like listening to music, singing, play an instruments and hum. You can teach them by listening to music, singing, rhythm, melody.

With reference to Komorowska (2003), linguistic intelligence correlate with learning foreign language however, math-logic intelligence is helpful in learning

grammatical structures. Musical intelligence correlate with teaching pronunciation but interpersonal intelligence support conversations in target language. Other kinds of intelligence aid process of learning. You should use visual materials in order to exploit spatial intelligence or physical games to use bodily-kinesthetic. (internet resource: www.gardnerschool.org/eightwaysofsmart.php)

3 Learning characteristics

Halliwell claims that young children bring to the classroom the set of instincts, skills and characteristics that help to learn English. They 'are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words' (Halliwell 1992:3). Pupils can use limited language creatively. They like finding and creating fun. They fastest learn indirectly rather than directly.

3.1 Teaching English to young children

According to Komorowska (2003), the methods of teaching English language to older children do not work with young one. If you teach young learners you should take into consideration features of their development. They concrete think and mechanical remember, for this reason, the learning should be connected with concrete things and situations. In centre of learning there are names of things and people, simple instructions and expressions. Pupils learn vocabulary but do not learn grammar in formal way. They only repeat sentences.

Young children characterise fast memorizing and short attention span therefore, you should use very often attractive repetition. Pupils like short songs, chants and poems. Exercises should be varies and be supported by pictures, sound and action. It is useful to colour illustrations, play game, watch video and sing songs. You should also repeat known part of material.

Owing to the children's need of fun and action, the teaching should include language playing and should be based on movement, drawing, colouring, cutting out, sticking and physical games. Young children need drama, art and music expression.

Pupils want to do a task if they feel that they are ready. It is means that you must

not make them speak if they do not want, because listening is the best way of learning English. On the other hand, you can encourage them to choral repetitions due the fact that they feel safely in a group. To make easy their individual speaking, you can organize simple drama and do not correct mistakes. It is worth to often repeat short phrases such as greeting and thanks to encourage shy pupils to speak. Reilly and Ward (1997) point that young pupils need both free and guided art and craft activities. They are very important part of lesson because develop children's independence and allows them the freedom to chose what they draw or paint.

Komorowska (2003) claims that emotional reactions of young learners are stronger than intellectual one. Pupils like being with a friendly and witty teacher who encourage them to do activities. If children are bored it is means that you should change an activity, topic or situation. You must remember that competition in games can motivate but often discourage pupils who lose. You should limit competitions or enable children win in different categories such as speaking, drawing, singing and running. Humour and comedy help in learning so you can use comics, cartoons, jokes.

The main purpose of teaching young children is developing of their listening skills, as a consequence, you should speak in English as much as possible and use recording, video, songs and chants during lessons. What is more, you must encourage pupils to further learning by praise and showing that learning is interesting and pleasant. Usefulness of learning English in older life do not invite them to learning. With reference to Brown (2000) a learner with a proper motivation can achieve success in learning foreign language.

3.2 The individual learner

The social climate of the classroom depends on individual's contribution. 'Despite the tendency towards establishing group norms of behaviour in the classroom, every learner remains an individual; no learning groups ever totally homogenous except in cases of shared culture or roughly compatible age ranges' (Wright 1987:117). In the class there is a series of differences between individual children. Wright (1987) distinguishes four main types of learner:

- The enthusiast

This kind centres on the teacher however, at the same time is concerned with the purposes of the class.

➤ The oracular

This type tends towards the teacher as a point of reference. On the other hand, he or she much more focus attention on the satisfaction of personal aims.

➤ The participator

This kind is oriented towards both group goals and group solidarity.

➤ The rebel

This type mainly focus attention on the satisfaction of his own purposes. He or she leans towards the class for his or her point of reference.

Nauczanie dzieci w wieku od sześciu do dziewięciu lat języka angielskiego tylko wtedy może być skuteczne, gdy uwzględnimy ich cechy rozwojowe. Dzieci charakteryzuje konkretne myślenie i pamięć mechaniczna, dlatego też nauka musi dotyczyć konkretnych przedmiotów i sytuacji. Dzieci cechują też krótkie odcinki koncentracji uwagi oraz szybkie zapominanie pomimo szybkiego uczenia się. Z tego też powodu nauczanie musi odbywać się przez atrakcyjne powtórzenia takie jak: piosenki, rymowanki lub wiersze. Dzieci potrzebują zabawy i fizycznej aktywności, a to oznacza, że nauka musi być oparta na zabawie językowej i wielostronnej aktywności. Reakcje emocjonalne dzieci w tym wieku są bardzo silne i spontaniczne, dlatego też znudzenie i niechęć z ich strony należy traktować jako sygnał do zmiany aktywności lub tematu. Najważniejszym dla nich czynnikiem motywującym to życzliwy i zachęcający nauczyciel, z którym lubią przebywać. Dzieci charakteryzuje też różny poziom i typ inteligencji. Z sukcesem w nauce języka angielskiego koreluje inteligencja lingwistyczna a w opanowaniu gramatyki pomaga inteligencja logiczno-matematyczna. Inteligencja muzyczna koreluje z nauką wymowy, a inteligencja interpersonalna ułatwia prowadzenie rozmów. Inne rodzaje inteligencji wspomagają naukę języka, z tego powodu należy stosować pomoce wizualne i gry ruchowe.

Bibliography

- Brown, H.D., *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, New York, Longman, 2000
- Halliwell, S., *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*, Harlow, Longman, 1992
- Komorowska, H., *Metodyka Nauczania języków obcych*, Warszawa, Fraszka Edukacyjna,
- Reilly, V., Ward, S.M., *Very Young Learners*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997
- Roth, G., *Teaching Very Young Children*, London, Richmond Publishing, 1998
- Scott, W.A., Ytreberg, *Teaching English to Children*, Harlow, Longman 2002
- Wright, T., *Roles of Teachers and Learners*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987
- <http://www.gardnerschool.org/eightwaysofsmart.php>

opracowała

Renata Dufaj