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English learning areas in pre-primary classrooms: an investigation of their effectiveness

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Abstract

In many countries English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching now begins in pre-primary school classrooms where, typically, general learning activities are organised in learning areas, which are intended to promote the development of specific knowledge and skills, and much of the learning occurs through children's play. EFL pedagogy for this specialised context is undeveloped and, it seems, children's exposure to the English language (when it is taught) is often form-focused and limited to teacher-led activities, such as the repetition of language items, the singing of songs and the playing of games. Opportunities for developing the variety of language knowledge and skills needed for meaningful oral communication in the target language are rare.

The aim of this report is to describe and exemplify an approach to teaching the English language to young children, which aims to encourage and support children's spontaneous and natural use of the language they are learning in a manner which reflects their stage of development. The approach incorporates teacher-led activity and teacher-facilitated opportunity for children's experimental and creative use of English in a specially resourced English Learning Area (ELA) within the classroom.

The approach has been developed, trialled and evaluated by a team of researchers and teachers in Portugal and South Korea. Findings so far indicate an increase in the learners' interest in the English language, more frequent use of English in the classroom, a greater variety of English use by learners and increased confidence amongst teachers in their ability to create principled and coherent English language learning experiences for children in pre-primary classrooms.

1

Introduction

The research on the benefits of an early start in foreign language learning is not particularly encouraging as findings over a long period of time suggest that when the foreign language learning is restricted to the classroom there are few, if any, long term gains from starting foreign language learning at a very young age. In her review of the studies of young children's instructed foreign language learning, Murphy (2014) concludes that the notion of "younger is better" is not supported with empirical evidence. Nevertheless, she maintains that introducing foreign language learning into the primary curriculum "...is unquestionably a good idea", for a number of reasons. For example, younger children typically have high motivation and positive attitudes towards learning which, together with high quality teaching, can lead to enjoyable and beneficial learning experiences. The language knowledge and skills developed during such experiences can, as Murphy suggests, create a strong foundation for more effective language learning in the future (2014: 163).

However, the trend to lower the starting age of English language teaching around the world has also raised discussion about the quality, appropriateness and coherence of provision for younger learners. These concerns have led to research mostly in the form of large-scale surveys and evaluation of current practice – see, for example, the British Council publications of Garton et al (2011), and Enever (2011). The impression given in the literature reviewed is that despite pockets of excellence, there are significant weaknesses at the level of policy, training and methodology, and these weaknesses can have a negative effect on children's learning experiences and achievement.

It seems that, in many cases, the mandatory introduction of EFL teaching in primary schools has preceded appropriate curriculum and materials development (Enever and Moon, 2009; Garton et al, 2011); that there are insufficient opportunities for specialist training and professional development in teaching primary EFL (Nunan, 2003; Kirkgöz, 2009); that the youngest learners are often taught by less experienced and under qualified teachers (Ng, 2011; Emery, 2012) and that teaching methods, often

borrowed, it seems, from secondary school EFL practice, do not reflect the needs and characteristics of primary school aged children. Although in some countries this situation is improving, there is still little evidence of differentiated curricula which are designed to meet the needs of young learners in different age groups (Nunan, *ibid*).

Our own observations of current foreign language teaching to children under six years of age in pre-primary classrooms in Europe, Asia and South America are in accordance with the views expressed above. We have seen that much EFL teaching and learning in this sector is restricted to teacher instruction and children's repetition of certain language items, the singing of songs and playing games. Whilst it is recognised that such activity can make a valuable contribution to the development of discrete foreign language skills, it is unlikely on its own to promote the variety and depth of language knowledge that is needed for genuine, spontaneous and meaningful communication.

A recent European Commission working paper on Early Language Learning (ELL) (July 2011b) acknowledges the situation described above and states that "there is little evidence of agreed processes, uniformity of approach or established indicators of achievement in ELL" (European Union 2011b: 14). The variety of evidence emerging in the literature (see, for example, Černá, 2015; Ellis, 2015; Portiková, 2015 and Rokita-Jaškov, 2013) and from our own observations in many countries of the world, suggests that there is an urgent need to consider the coherence and consistency of primary English language teaching practice at the macro level, whilst developing new pedagogy at a micro level that is appropriate to the developmental needs of different age groups. As acknowledged by Ellis (2014), each age range has distinctive requirements that should be recognised in curricular and teaching approaches. The global expansion of English teaching at the pre-primary level creates an opportunity to begin this process with a focus on developing pedagogy for the youngest learners. This will help to ensure appropriate and consistent practice as learners progress upwards.

Pre-primary teachers will not have to rely on methods originally designed for older learners and curriculum specialists and teachers of older children can build on the English language curriculum developed in pre-primary school to ensure successful transition. Thus, the intention of the study reported here is to make a contribution to the development of methodology for the teaching of English in pre-primary classrooms, which can be adapted for use in different contexts around the world, and which can influence the development of methodology for older learners.

2

Guiding principles

Our contribution to the development of methodology focuses on refining typical teacher-led practices using stories and extending these practices so that they facilitate child-initiated use of the target language during free play. This approach builds on the work of Mourão (2001) and, we believe, provides a coherent and holistic structure, which combines age-appropriate opportunities to learn and practise English in teacher-controlled activity with additional opportunities for learners to use and experiment with the newly learnt language in free play activity in designated English learning areas within the classroom. The development of the approach was influenced by three inter-related principles which emphasise that pre-primary English language teaching should:

- be integrated into existing classroom routines
- combine teacher-led activity and teacher-facilitated opportunity to use the target language
- include a classroom space and resources that will stimulate use of the target language during child-initiated, free play activity.

It is our view that an integrated approach, where new language is introduced and practised through activities that are familiar to children, and in a manner appropriate to their stage of development, enhances the language learning process. The methodology we propose gives prominence to the importance of planning teacher-led activities in unison with the planning of opportunities for children to use the target language forms. This approach allows teachers to further develop existing expertise in form-focused, teacher-led instruction and incorporate it into a more comprehensive approach to EFL teaching, which can facilitate spontaneous and creative use of the taught language naturally, through play activity.

These two complementary principles, which emphasise the importance of integrated and naturalistic learning in pre-primary classrooms, lead into the third principle, which highlights the need for an English language area (ELA), or physical space, in the classroom, comparable to the learning areas (also called activity centres or interest areas) which are typical of many pre-primary classrooms. The purpose of the ELA is to stimulate and facilitate children's use of the target language they have previously been introduced to and practised with the teacher.

3

Research questions

Our main focus of interest in this study was to assess the value of English learning areas (ELAs) in pre-primary classrooms and to gauge the contribution they made to pre-primary children's English language development. This aspect of the study was guided by the following key questions:

1. Do ELAs, which are resourced to reflect the content of teacher-led EFL activities, have an impact on the children's learning of English?
2. What conditions or features in the ELA are most effective in stimulating target language use?
3. What evidence is there of English language learning?

During the implementation and trialling of the approach in pre-primary classrooms in Portugal and South Korea, we were involved in collecting information that allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating ELA activities with daily classroom routines. We also attempted to identify features of practice which exemplified a successful linking of explicit teaching of language forms and later implicit learning through spontaneous play activity.

4

Theoretical background

The development of the approach to teaching English to pre-primary children described in this report was influenced by literature within the multidisciplinary fields of childhood studies and language learning. This brief review focuses specifically on aspects of early childhood education that characterise typical pre-primary practice throughout the world, and also research studies of early second language learning.

Approaches to early childhood education

Although perspectives on and practice in early childhood education vary between cultures there is a general recognition of the value and importance of education and care for children from birth to official school entry age. Analysis of cross-nationally comparable data (conducted with a view to defining internationally agreed principles for educational programmes) suggests that the most effective early childhood education has an “intentional education component”, aims to be holistic in approach and endeavours to support “children’s early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development” (UNESCO, 2012: 26). Typical characteristics of early years practice around the world include learning through interaction, the introduction of mathematical and alphabetical concepts, physical education and play based activity (ibid, p. 27).

Play, in particular, has been central to childhood education since the beginning of the twentieth century and has been described by Moyles (2010: 10) as a “powerful scaffold” for children’s learning. Research has provided substantial evidence that planned, stimulating play environments improve verbal communication, social and interaction skills, creativity and imagination as well as problem solving and divergent thinking skills (Kalliala, 2006; Wood and Atfield, 2005). Findings from Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) suggest that the best early years education achieves a balance between “...opportunities for children to benefit from teacher-initiated group work and the provision of freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities” (2002: 43). According to the European Commission (2014) and Kernan (2007: 12), effective early-years education programmes combine the practice of adult-led and structured

child-initiated activity. In the context of pre-primary English language education, the notions of potentially instructive play and structured child-initiated activity suggest the need for teachers to plan, organise and facilitate additional opportunities for children to re-engage with the language that has been previously taught, during free play activities.

Countries around the world which adopt a child-directed and social, pedagogic approach to early years education, typically divide the pre-primary classroom into different learning areas or activity centres. These areas contain instructional materials and are organised to provide opportunities for children to learn as they play alone or whilst interacting with others. Typical learning areas include a dramatic area, a reading area, a writing area, a construction area and a science area. In these areas teachers place resources for children to interact with, and, in so doing, provide opportunities for learning to be developed and/or extended. Child-initiated activity enables a child “to explore materials and situations for oneself” (Moyles, 1989: 14) and there is evidence that through child-initiated play children become responsible for their learning; they experiment, make mistakes, decisions and choices as they begin to develop the attributes of autonomous learners (Bruce, 2011: 23-26).

European Guidelines for teaching English in pre-primary education suggest that ELL should be “integrated into contexts in which the language is meaningful and useful, such as in everyday or playful situations” (European Commission, 2011b: 14). To ensure that children’s learning of English is integrated and meaningful, we suggest that planned opportunities to play in English need to reflect daily routines and be built into short term planning. The creation of an ELA alongside other learning areas can provide children with an appropriate space to play in and access to familiar resources first used in the teacher-led English sessions (see Mourão, 2014; Mourão and Robinson, 2015).

Teacher-led activity

Sociocultural theories of first language development lay emphasis on language being learned through interaction with others, with knowledge becoming internalised during this social activity (Lightbown and Spada, 2014). Jerome Bruner's seminal work in the 1980s revealed that interaction between child and parent was structured around routines and familiar situations. Bruner (1983: 45) describes these routine activities as an occasion for "systematic use of language with an adult", and has called them "closely circumscribed format(s)" (ibid: 46). A "format", he maintains, "is a routinized and repeated interaction in which [adults and children] do things [...] together using language" (ibid: 132, emphasis in the original) and are made up of three essential components:

- a sequential structure and a set of realisation rules (ibid: 46)
- clearly marked turn-taking roles (ibid: 47)
- a scriptlike quality that involves action and communication together (Bruner ibid: 121).

Readers around the world, who have had small children, will remember playing "Peek a boo!" with their child as a baby. This is a typical example of a format. Parents begin by hiding and reappearing with the exclamation "Peek a boo!" Over time the young child imitates the hiding action and then the reappearing actions with the accompanying vocalisation, "Peek a boo!". This type of learning, which moves the child from observer of action to participant in action, is referred to by Bruner as the "handover principle" (ibid: 60). It is a process in which the parent facilitates, or scaffolds, the child's attempts to do the action successfully. As the child accomplishes parts of the routine the scaffold is removed little by little until it is able to proceed alone. Parents do this intuitively, and as a result, children naturally acquire their first language.

Though Bruner's work focused on children's first language acquisition, the concept of formats and the "handover principle" are useful for understanding how teacher-led activities can support learners' second language development. Formats appear in classroom routines and in game-like activities. They typically contain routinised and repeated interaction between adult and children. They provide children with opportunities to predict, they support their understanding and ensure that they pick up language and build their vocabulary. As Ellis (2002) suggests, it is the frequency of exposure to linguistic features, and how often certain features are encountered together with physical actions or as part of a routine, that supports learners in acquiring language. The intervention developed in this study was dependent upon the repetition of routine activities in English. As such, a small battery of game-like activities were repeatedly set up and played and this provided children with the opportunity to become familiar with the format components. The English teacher also ensured that children were given opportunities to sometimes lead the activities, thus putting into practice the handover principle.

The Play Spiral

In developing our framework to support teacher-led and child-initiated activity in English we have used Mourão's (2014: 257) adaptation of Moyles' "Play Spiral" (see Figure 01). To provide the children with the target language to play in English, the Play Spiral begins with direct instruction (Garton, 1992) in adult-led play. At this stage in the spiral process, children are exposed to the language they need to participate in a future activity.

Once the adult-led activity is over, children can move into child-initiated play activity and interact with the resources and other children in the ELA. They are able to 're-enact' the routines they participated in during the teacher-led activity, and experiment and decide for themselves what they want to do with the ELA resources.

In a following English session the children's prior learning is reinforced, and opportunities to construct new knowledge through formal instruction are presented during teacher-led play. The more opportunities children are given to move from teacher-led to child-initiated play, the more confident they are likely to become in the target language and in the activities they engage with in that language. In the Play Spiral, the term "accretion" is used to denote a gradual accumulation of types of cognitive and linguistic knowledge together with the skills that allow the knowledge to be used automatically and appropriately. Through play, children accumulate understandings about the materials, the activities and the language used.

Familiarity then supports the children's recognition of the underlying patterns, or concepts, which in turn enables them to restructure their understanding. This cycle is repeated until a new learning experience has been thoroughly acquired and become automatic. This period is characterised by fluency or mastery of skills. In the case of language learning, it is evident in a child's use of English.

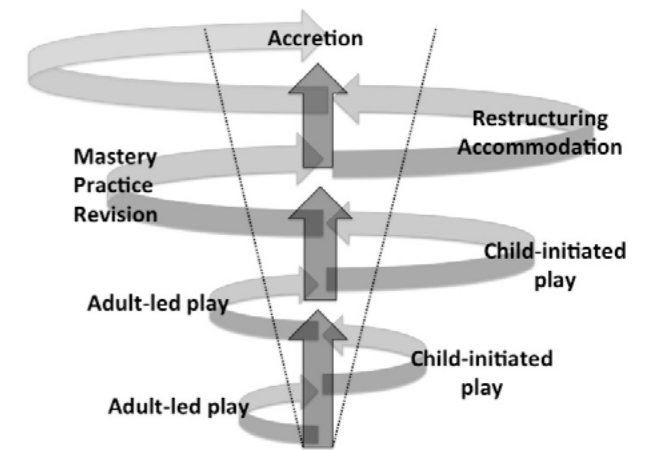


Figure 01: The Play Spiral, adapted from Moyles (1989: 16)

The English Language Area: resourcing, responsibilities and autonomy

An important purpose of an ELA is to provide a facility that is organised to stimulate children's natural use of the target language items that are presented in the teacher-led activities. Increasing the accessibility of English and making it visible in the classroom through English resources such as signs, posters, books and the story-based materials used in the teacher-led activities, signals its importance and gives it a value equal to the other themed learning areas.

Learning areas are typically set up and resourced by the pre-primary educator to reflect the children's interests. However, in relation to the ELA, it is likely that the English teacher is responsible for resourcing the space. Nevertheless, the pre-primary educator is responsible for planning time in the children's schedule to play in the learning areas, for child-initiated free play takes place during the day not during English sessions. The pre-primary educator is also responsible for setting rules for using the learning areas, which are usually agreed upon in a democratic way with the children. For example, the number of children allowed to play in a particular area; how children signal that they want to play in a different area; how they organise the resources at the end of their play turn etc. These rules are for all areas; however, an additional rule will exist in the ELA, related to using English as much as possible. The creation, organisation and management of the ELA is thus a collaborative activity involving the pre-primary educator, the English teacher and the learners.

Peer interaction

Evidence from the field of second language acquisition supports the claim that peer interaction and talk contributes to language development, although most research focuses on L2 children interacting with L1 peers, with the absence of access to native speakers in a foreign language context being considered a downside (Blum-Kulka and Snow, 2004). Nevertheless, it appears that what contributes to language development is the “shared familiarity [together] with ‘raw materials’” (ibid: 299) incorporated into pretend play. Though there is little empirical evidence this is the case in foreign language learning contexts, it is recognised that there is a relationship between teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction. Peer interaction is said to be both influenced by and complemented by other types of interaction in the classroom (Philip et al, 2014). It is our belief that the shared familiarity experienced during teacher-led activities, supported by the resources associated with English, prompt children to interact in English.

Due to the level of proficiency of children in low exposure contexts it is not expected that children will produce complete sentences in English, or that they will speak solely in English. It is recognised that learners will fall back on their L1 to enable communication to occur (Lüdi, 2003), especially in contexts of a shared L1. In addition, they will confidently produce code-mixed sentences, inserting L2 nouns and verbs into an L1 sentence, and reproducing formulaic language. The acceptance of code-switching in a classroom depends upon the relationship between language competence and how the context is appreciated by those involved (Zarate et al., 2011). If contributions from students in their L1 are valued with a view to supporting later L2 use, multilingual speech will occur in the form of code-switching, enabling learners to interact as aspiring bilingual speakers, as such demonstrating their increasing linguistic repertoire (Kramsch et al., 2011).

Story-based activities

The intervention used in this study comprised a sequence of teacher-led classroom activities based around a story, presented in either authentic picturebooks or in stories specifically written for very young language learners. The decision to make a story a central feature of the intervention was influenced by several reasons. Firstly, stories are a universal feature in pre-primary school classrooms throughout the world where story reading and telling is a routine activity. Secondly, there is an abundance of readily available literature written for young children, some of which can be downloaded without

cost from the internet and some of which comes together with supplementary resources and guidance for teachers. Thirdly, the educational value of stories is well recognised, with research over many decades demonstrating the strong connections between listening to stories and young children’s cognitive, social, emotional, first language and literacy development. Of particular relevance here are studies which have found significant increases in learners’ second language vocabulary knowledge from listening to stories (Elley, 1989) and greater oral participation during EFL story reading activities contributing to greater intrinsic motivation and engagement from the learners (Li and Seedhouse, 2010: 288). Finally, story-based approaches in ELL programmes are common throughout the world due, in part, to the universal appeal of stories such as *The Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 2002) and *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury, 1989). The availability of publications which offer guidance for using these stories in an English language teaching and learning context (see, for example, Ellis and Brewster, 2014) make them additionally appealing for use in young learner classrooms.

Sequencing of activities

Having decided what to teach, in our case, a particular story that will create a stimulus and some content for language learning, attention needs to be given to the type and timing of the language learning activities. Selecting and sequencing learning activities to achieve short and longer term learning objectives is an essential part of the planning process. A framework that we used and found helpful in sequencing activities in a logical and progressive manner is known as the “Encounter, Engage and Exploit” (EEE) model (Mourão and Gamboa, 2007). This model reflects the language teaching methodology well known to language teachers throughout the world as PPP, or ‘Presentation, Practice, and Production’. Both models suggest a sequence of activities that begins with the introduction, or presentation, of new language. This is followed by activities that encourage learners to engage with and practise the new language and continues with opportunities to use the newly learnt language creatively and for real communicative purposes. Whereas the PPP methodology has been criticised for being teacher-centred and linear in approach, the EEE model provides a child-centred approach which considers the roles and responsibilities of both teacher and learner in the selection and sequencing of language learning activities (see also Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2001). Table 2 summarises the EEE model:

Child	Teacher
Encounters the words and phrases, using their ears, eyes and body as well as their understanding of the world to put the language into context.	Introduces the children to the language, providing comprehensible input in a lively and interesting way. Activities are teacher-led and controlled with lots of repetition.
Engages with the language, often in controlled situations through repetitive games and tasks. There is an emphasis on becoming more responsible for remembering the language.	Scaffolds children and provides support through: 1. Controlled engagement (focus on accuracy). 2. Guided engagement (focus on fluency and meaning).
Exploits the language for their own pleasure, using it in freer contexts with a clear purpose to communicate - often in pair games and group games and most often in the ELA.	Monitors and scaffolds children during circle time activities.

Table 1: The EEE Model

Following the first two stages of the EEE model, teachers can plan sequences of learning activities which are designed to expose children to new language and then allow them to practise it through specific games and tasks that will develop understanding, fluency and accuracy. The intention of the third stage is to enable children to exploit their knowledge of English, i.e. be creative with it in childlike ways. This highlights the significance of the ELA in pre-primary language learning as it provides the place where children can have the freedom to choose and use the language. At the planning stage, attention needs to be given to the type of resources that will be needed in the ELA to stimulate interaction and use of English during the *exploit* stage.

In addition to the EEE model, teachers also need to be aware of the kinds of responses that an activity demands of the children. *Encounter* activities are likely to encourage a more physical response, or one where children respond in chorus. *Engage* activities involve children gradually taking control of the language and beginning to respond as individuals. *Exploit* activities provide an opportunity for individual practice and choice in the language the children want to use. A list of the activities organised to reflect this framework and used during the study can be found in Appendix A, *Instructions for Games* (see also Coelho and Mourão, 2009).

5

Description of the study

The development and evaluation of the approach discussed in this report took place in pre-primary classrooms in Portugal and South Korea. The two countries were chosen because of existing professional relationships between the researchers, and their contacts with schools and teachers who had an interest in the project and were willing to participate in it. In both countries, compulsory schooling starts at 5 or 6 years of age. In Portugal, English language lessons have been offered as a voluntary, extra-curricular, enrichment activity in primary schools since 2005, but from September 2015 English will become part of the primary curriculum from Year 3. In South Korea, English lessons were officially introduced into the national curriculum from Year 3 in 1997 (Song, 2012: 34).

In both Portugal and South Korea, pre-primary education and care services are provided by the state and private institutions and, although not compulsory, the majority of Portuguese and South Korean children under 5 years of age attend some form of pre-primary institution (see GEPE, 2012). Neither country has a statutory pre-primary curriculum, but official guidelines are available to support teaching in this sector.

Pre-primary education in Portugal

In Portugal early childhood education and care guidelines are influenced by socio-constructivist theories of learning, which suggest that the construction of new knowledge is a socially collaborative enterprise that requires the active involvement of the learners. As a result, a typical pre-primary classroom in Portugal is open plan and divided into different learning areas or activity centres, which aim to provide opportunities for children to actively engage in both teacher-initiated

group work and child-initiated play activities. Teachers are encouraged to create environments which will stimulate children to learn “by doing” and through discovery (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2013; Ministério da Educação, 1997). There is no official early language learning strategy for pre-primary education in Portugal but some state and private pre-primary schools offer a foreign language (European Commission, 2011a) as an extra-curricular and sometimes fee-paying activity. The foreign language classes are usually disassociated from other aspects of the school’s curriculum. English is the most popular foreign language taught and specialist language teachers are recruited to give lessons of around 30-45 minutes once or twice a week. The low frequency and short duration of the lessons means that learners’ exposure to the language is limited.

The institution in Portugal

The school in which the study took place in Portugal is a private pre-primary school in central Portugal where English lessons have been part of the curriculum for children from 4 to 6 years of age since 2001. The study focused on the older children, a group of sixteen 5 to 6 year olds (ten boys and six girls) who were in their second year of English. The children were accompanied by a qualified pre-primary educator, Maria, and her teaching assistant. A qualified and experienced, peripatetic English teacher, Amélia, gave two 30-minute sessions of “formal instruction” in English each week. The lessons were given during the morning with the educator present in the classroom to accompany and assist in the children’s learning.

(All names as pseudonyms)

Pre-primary education in South Korea

The current guidelines for Kindergarten education provided by the South Korean government (Ministry of Education, 2011) also promote a child-centred and play-oriented teaching approach and typical pre-primary classrooms in South Korea are open plan and divided into different learning areas or activity centres. However, much of the learning activity is led by the teacher, focuses on the development of academic skills and is directed to the whole class. This, perhaps, reflects the very competitive Korean educational environment and Korean parents' expectations that their children will develop literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for primary school.

Although there is no official early English language learning strategy for pre-primary education in Korea, English has been regarded as "...the most important foreign language in South Korea for the past six decades or so" (Song, 2012: 34) and, as a result, a growing number of children are enrolled in fee-paying pre-primary establishments, some of which claim to be "English kindergartens" (ibid: 40).

The institution in South Korea

In South Korea the intervention was carried out in a pre-primary school located on the university campus, run by the university, and serving mostly university employees. The parents of children attending this school have a strong awareness of the importance and high status of English as an international language and many of the children have some experience of English outside of school. The implementation of the intervention was conducted by two South Korean English teachers who were also

taking a university postgraduate TESOL certificate course. They volunteered to give two 30-minute, teacher led, story-based sessions per week and to create the ELA in the classroom.

Phases of the study

The main purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of a more holistic and integrated approach to the teaching and learning of English in pre-primary education. The intervention aimed to intensify the teaching and increase opportunities for using English in a meaningful context. The methodology followed was typical of action research in that, having identified a weakness in the teaching and learning of English, a teaching intervention was designed and then implemented and evaluated by the teachers and researchers. The central focus of the evaluation was to analyse children's use of the ELA and to determine its contribution to the overall development of the children's English language competence. A feature of the study is that it was a collaborative venture bringing together teachers, a pre-primary educational consultant and academic researchers in an effort to create what Wenger has termed a "community of practice" (1998). In this study, the community represented members with a variety of academic and experiential knowledge from different parts of the world which enriched the discussion and planning of the intervention and brought different insights to the analysis and evaluation of the data.

The study took place over twelve months from October 2013 and was organised in three phases: an orientation phase, an implementation phase and an analysis of data phase.

Phase one

During the first orientation phase, permission to implement the study was requested of the school, the children and their parents. The researchers then met and observed teaching in the pre-primary school in Portugal, where ELAs were an established feature in the classroom. Meetings were held with teachers to share understandings, discuss the aims of the project and plan and develop the intervention. Stories were chosen, lesson plans were created and attention was given to how the ELA was to be positioned in the classroom and how it was to be resourced to reflect the content and activity of the teaching sessions.

The planning of the teacher-led activities took into consideration the needs of the children learning English as a foreign language, the quality of the story and the nature of the activities. These considerations are summarised in the table below.

Needs of the learners	To be active participants To have repeated exposure to the target language through memorable routines To have opportunities to connect language forms to meanings To have opportunities to practise using language items
Features of a story	Age appropriate content Illustrations which support the narrative Repetition of event and language forms Rhythm and rhyme which invite participation Opportunities for participation Opportunities for natural discussion Familiar discourse structures Strong characterisation
Features of activities	Consistent use of familiar organisational language Structured presentation of new language Opportunity to construct knowledge about new language Opportunity to "encounter, engage and exploit" new language Flexibility to accommodate learners' spontaneous responses Problem solving tasks Variety of activities Sequenced to promote incremental development of specific language knowledge and skills Recognisable outcomes Reproducible by the children in the ELA

Table 2: Considerations for teacher-led activities

These considerations recognise the language learners' need for multiple exposures to new language items in meaningful contexts so that they can be first "noticed" (a term used by Schmidt (1990) to indicate the start of the learning process), secondly "structured" (a term used to describe the construction of linguistic knowledge about the language item), and thirdly, stored in the mind for future, automatic use. Young children's natural desire to want to listen to repeated readings of favourite stories is, therefore, a useful characteristic which can be exploited by teachers to focus attention on specific language they want children to learn. The same can be said for the repetition of game-like activities.

The planning of the unit of work took into account the need to understand and enjoy the content of the story and to create activities to develop specific language skills, language functions and language knowledge. The activities were organised into lessons which provided sequences of activities designed to provide opportunities for children to encounter, engage with and exploit language.

Phase two

The second phase of the study involved implementing the intervention and collecting the evidence needed to evaluate it. Details of the teacher-led activities provided in the unit of work can be found in Appendix B and the resources used in the teacher-led activities and placed in the ELA can be found in Appendixes C to G. The unit of work and the accompanying resources provide an example of how one story can be exploited for the learning of English in teacher-led activities and can provide a focus for using the language during child-initiated play in the ELA. The story was one of several that were used successfully in both the Portuguese and the South Korean pre-primary schools.

The organisation of the unit of work allowed for conceptual understanding and language to be built up incrementally by starting with what the children already knew and then introducing new concepts and new language. Teacher-controlled practice supported with visual cues, for example in the chants and games, allowed learners opportunities to build confidence in using the target language. The resources used in each lesson were kept in the ELA for children to play with and to act as a stimulus for further use of English.

Phase three

Data collection: a naturalistic and mainly qualitative approach was taken to data collection with a view to capturing evidence of multiple aspects of the English language teaching and learning contexts and the perspectives of all those involved. The researchers carried out non-participant observation of the teacher-led activity and the learner activity in the ELAs and held informal interviews with the teachers and the learners. Children's drawings about English and the ELA were also collected in Portugal. Photographs of teaching and learning in action were taken and audio recordings of the English sessions were made. Because of the collaborative nature of the study and the interest and co-operation that existed between the researchers and teachers, respondent validation, in which observations were shared, discussed and verified, became a routine part of the research process. In Portugal, registers were kept to measure how many children played in the ELAs and how often.

6

Discussion of findings

The data provided evidence to support our claim that an approach to teaching English to pre-primary children that integrates teacher-led activities with an ELA that stimulates use of the taught language, can have a positive effect on children's language development. Analysis of observational and interview data confirmed that children enjoy being in an appropriately resourced ELA and that the resources placed in them can serve as prompts for English language use. Further analysis led to identification of children's behaviour, which exemplifies successful linking of taught language forms with later use of the language forms in play activity in the ELA. Three significant play behaviours were identified in the data. They are:

- replicating teacher-led activities
- reproducing pre-fabricated chunks of language
- taking on the role of teacher and pupil.

There were also interesting examples in the data of children:

- using English in their own invented games
- supporting each other's use of English (peer scaffolding).

The following discussion starts by illustrating the popularity of the ELAs with the children in the Portuguese and South Korean schools and is followed by a presentation and commentary of the key findings identified above.

Popularity of the ELA

Data was collected in Portugal to measure how often children played in the ELA. Maria, the educator, reported that children chose to play in the ELA most days, but suggested that their choice was often dependent on whether new resources were available. She noted that the children were more motivated to play in the ELA when there was a new picturebook, a new set of flashcards or a new resource. What is clear in the data is that all children played in the ELA and that for many of the children it was a popular choice of learning area. For a few it was the most popular choice.

Comparisons of individual children's participation in teacher-led sessions with their visits to the ELA revealed that the children who showed greatest interest and participated most enthusiastically in the teacher-led sessions tended to play more often in the ELA. However, there were also children who could be described as quiet, who did not appear to participate in the taught sessions but who did appear to enjoy being in the ELA. In one case, a particularly timid child visited the ELA well above the average number of times. As the year progressed the teachers noticed an increase in the child's interest, confidence and participation during the teacher-led English sessions.

Interview data from educators and children in Portugal confirmed that the children enjoyed being in the ELA with favourite playmates, and this seemed to foster a positive atmosphere in the ELA which, in turn, encouraged the use of English. Interestingly, the educators noted that there were fewer peer disagreements when children were engaged in free play activity in the ELA than during their play in other areas. This suggests that the ELAs provided a stimulating and purposeful learning area that fulfilled the children's needs and where they felt comfortable interacting with the resources and one another.

Cases of children who played by themselves were reported in both Portugal and South Korea. These solitary children looked at picturebooks or story cards, went through folders which contained their work or played a game by themselves that was intended for two or more players. It was noted in observation field notes that although the solitary children were mostly silent, they mouthed English words and expressions which were relevant to the materials they were handling. Occasionally, they would vocalise English words that had relevance in their play. Figure 02 shows Alice holding up her fingers and counting in English as she read a counting book in the ELA.



Figure 02: Alice counting on her fingers while looking at a picturebook

The data from the schools in both Portugal and Korea provide evidence of children engaging with the resources and enjoying a variety of activities in the ELAs. New resources were always popular, but the children also played regularly with favourite materials.

In Korea the children enjoyed singing a song adapted from the story *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?* (Martin and Carle, 1997). The flashcards around the ELA seemed to serve as a stimulus, and their pointing at the coloured animals as they sang the song indicated not only their interest but also their understanding of the words they were singing. They were observed consistently pointing to and nominating images in English (see Figure 03).



Figure 03: A child in South Korea pointing to and nominating an image in English

Data from the interview with children in Portugal revealed many favourite activities, for example playing with friends and the puppet; playing the flashcard games; playing the board game with the dice; playing noughts and crosses; playing *Bingo!* and reading the books. Additional evidence was seen in their drawings when they were asked to draw their favourite activities. Their drawings depicted the singing of songs, playing *Bingo!* and the board game, playing with the puppet and the flashcard games. Figure 04 shows a drawing by Sara, who drew the ELA, recognisable because of the blue sofa on the left. She drew traffic lights which represent a song she enjoys singing with Amélia and the shelves with noughts and crosses and boxes of games and flashcards, which she likes playing. The smiling children suggest approval of their English language learning activity.



Figure 04: Sara's drawing of what she likes doing most in English

These findings indicate that ELAs can provide a happy place in the classroom which is attractive to a range of children and which is also conducive to learning. For some it can be a place to re-enact activities and interact with other children. For others it may be a secure place for solitary contemplation of the language that has been introduced by the teacher. The variety of evidence suggests that for all children, ELAs can have a positive effect on their language development.

Replicating teacher-led activities

A significant finding in the data from both Portugal and South Korea is that children frequently engaged in the same activities that they had experienced during teacher-led activities using the available resources. These activities included:

- singing songs
- looking at and retelling stories with picturebooks
- sequencing and retelling stories using picture cards
- dramatising stories using props, masks and puppets
- playing different games with flashcards
- using the puppet
- playing *Bingo!*, noughts and crosses, a board game.

The children's re-enactments of activities were influenced by the availability in the ELA of the same or similar resources that the educator had used in the teacher-led sessions (see Figures 05 and 06).



Figure 05: Children playing the board game during teacher-led activity



Figure 06: Two children playing a board game in the ELA

Photos follow of the children playing with different resources in the ELA.



Figure 07: Three children playing *Bingo!* in Portugal



Figure 08: Two boys sharing a picturebook in Portugal



Figure 09: Two children playing noughts and crosses in Portugal



Figure 10: Two children playing the pair game in South Korea



Figure 11: Children playing 'Say and point' in South Korea.

Reproducing pre-fabricated chunks of language

There is evidence in the transcripts of the audio recordings in both the Portuguese and South Korean ELAs that children code-switched between their first language and the English that they knew. Many of the examples of English that populated first language utterances were in the form of single words and prefabricated chunks of language (several words used together repeatedly). These chunks of language were taken from the English stories or game-like activities which the children had been exposed to in the teacher-led sessions. The example below is an illustration of code switching between Korean and English whilst the children were role-playing the story of 'Go Away Mr Wolf' (Price and Morozumi, 2002) using paper puppets. In amongst the many sentences they produced in Korean, the refrain 'Go away Mr. Wolf' was heard.

A: 문 열어 [Open, open the door]

B: 싫어 [No!]

A: 잡아 먹겠다 . [I will eat you up!]

B: Go away Mr. Wolf. Go away Mr. Wolf.

A: 싫어 [No, I will eat you up].

B: Ahhhh (runs away)

Children in Portugal were also observed using pre-fabricated chunks of language during activities like "Piggy Wiggy is a pilot" (see Fox and Fox, 2000) or when retelling stories. *I'm the Best!* (Cousins, 2011) was one such story, where children were exposed repeatedly to the grammatical forms "Dog can jump" (or run or swim etc.) and "Dog is happy" (or sad), as well as "I'm the best!", during teacher-led activities. These chunks of language were memorised by the children who recalled them and used them in the ELA while browsing through the resources which reminded them of the story.

These examples of memorising and reproducing pre-fabricated chunks of language are well understood to be a normal part of first language acquisition and foreign language learning. What is interesting in this context is that the source of the chunks of language were the stories and the teacher-led activities, and these are both central features in the approach to teaching that is being evaluated in this study.

Taking on the role of teacher and pupil

Anecdotal evidence collected over a decade in Portugal, along with findings from the data collected in this study in Portugal, indicate that one of the predominant activities in the ELA is the imitation of the teacher-led English sessions. Although there was less evidence of this type of play in South Korea, there is some evidence in the data of children taking on the role of teacher and pupil in play acting.

In Portugal, interview data with the children confirmed the popularity of playing teacher and pupil games. During their interview, children were asked what they did in the ELA. Two children gave the following replies:

Leticia: Me and Alice play at teacher and pupil. I am the teacher. The pupil chooses a game and then we have to teach Maria. [Eu e a Alice brincamos em professoras e aluno. Eu sou a professora. Enquanto o aluno escolher um jogo temos de ensinar a Maria]

Pedro: I play Boris, Isabel is the teacher. Boris doesn't know how to speak English. We play the colour game and *Stop!, Bingo!* and naughts and crosses. [Jogo o Boris, a Alice faz de professora. O Boris não sabe falar ingles. Jogamos dizer as cores (pair game) e stop, o bingo e jogo de galo]

Pedro admits he is the pupil when he plays with Isabel, but instead of being himself, he pretends to be Boris, a three-year old child in another class, who comes from Russia and can't speak Portuguese very well. He can't speak English either, as the three-year olds do not have English lessons. This exemplifies what Vygotsky (1978) calls real play, which is, essentially, dramatic and make-believe. Vygotsky portrayed it as consisting of an imaginary situation (an English lesson), the taking on of roles (a learner who really can't speak English), and a set of rules which determine the roles (the pupil never teaches the teacher).

During the observations it was also evident that certain children took on the role of teacher whilst others took on the role of the pupils. The teacher-pupil role-play was distinctly characterised by the imitation of their teacher's actions and words and the children's responses during the teacher-led activities. These characteristics are illustrated below.

Imitating teacher actions: In the picture below Magda can be seen sitting on the chair with another child, Alice, on the floor. Magda is holding a picturebook and was observed imitating the actions of the English teacher, Amélia, when she positioned the book so that Alice could see it (see Figure 12). Magda was heard to say, “Do you want to be the pupil? You can. I am Amélia” [*Queres ser aluna? Podes. Eu sou a Amélia*].



Figure 12: Magda and Alice playing at teacher and student

Imitating actions and words: The following extract taken from observation field notes provides more evidence of children’s natural tendency in their play to not only take on the role of others, but also to imitate their actions and words. The role play involves three children, who had been in the ELA for about eight minutes, looking at a picturebook together and retelling a story using story cards. They then started to play with a set of clothes flashcards. Isabel set up the flashcards and proceeded by organising a game:

Excerpt 1

Isabel: Put on your hat [mimed patting head]

Pedro & Sara: [Mimed patting their heads] hat

Isabel: STOP!

Pedro & Sara: [Froze]

Isabel: Put on your gloves!

Pedro & Sara: [Mimed putting on gloves] gloves

Isabel: You moved! [pointing at Pedro]

Pedro: Mas eu estou a respirar (trans: *But I’m breathing*) [sits down]

Isabel: Put on your coat!

Sara: [Mimes putting on a coat] coat

Pedro: [Stands up]

Isabel: Put on your scarf!

Pedro & Sara: [Mimed winding scarf around neck] scarf, scarf, scarf.

In the transcript above, it can be seen that all Isabel’s instructions are in English, as she is imitating exactly what their teacher, Amélia, had said during similar teacher-led activities. Isabel even uses the instruction, ‘You moved’, just as Amélia does during this game. Figure 13 is a photo of the three children playing *Stop!* Isabel is the child on the right.

This example illustrates Bruner’s description of a closely circumscribed format. There is a sequential structure to the game with very clear realisation rules. There are marked turn-taking roles, with Isabel instructing and the children responding. Finally there is a very clear script, which has been memorised from playing this game with Amélia.



Figure 13: Isabel, Pedro and Sara playing STOP!

Inventing activities in English

Consistent anecdotal feedback from educators in Portugal has included comments related to children inventing activities in which English was spoken, and in our study this was also observed on several occasions. In the data there were several examples of children exploiting language that they had learnt during teacher-led activities for use in new, invented games. One example of this creative use of language involved three boys, Bruno, David and Miguel. The data shows that during a 15-minute period the children exhibited behaviours that appeared to be imitations of the educator’s actions and language from the teacher-led activities and had applied them to their own games. For example, playing a guessing game with wild animal flashcards, an activity they play with their teacher Amélia, David held the flashcards so that Bruno could not see the animal and Bruno tried to guess what it was. Bruno used English, nominating the animals, e.g. “A lion”. David would reply “Yes!” or “No!”. If Bruno guessed correctly David placed the flashcard on the floor in a line - this is not what happened in the teacher-led sessions. As Bruno tried to guess he looked at the ever-longer line of flashcards to see which animal was missing. Once Bruno had guessed all the animals David took out the repeat flashcards (there are always two of each image) and continued the line of flashcards. Figure 14 shows the line and Bruno and David together with Miguel, who was more of an observer than a participant. The photograph

captures the second phase of their game, which involved David pointing to and saying all the animal words as Bruno mimed the animals. Then David called “Stop!” and Bruno froze until David called out another animal. The children were evidently enjoying themselves, as there was lots of laughter.



Figure 14: David and Bruno inventing a game based on ‘Stop!’

This creative use of language which involves retrieving words and phrases learnt in one context (in this case in the teacher-led activities) and applying it in a new context (such as the invented games) is a recognised process in children’s first language acquisition. It was interesting to observe the children in the study extending the use of known language in the same way, and we believe by so doing, it strengthened and deepened their understanding of the language items. We would also claim that it was the ELA that made this learning behaviour possible.

Peer scaffolding

There were many examples in the data of children scaffolding each other's attempts to communicate in the English language, prompting words that had been forgotten or even correcting misuse of language. For example, during a game of *Bingo!* (see Figure 07) Sara was the caller and Vasco and David, in their role as pupils, began to respond with "Yes, it is", if they had the correct image on their bingo card, or "No, it isn't", if they did not. This particular script comes from another game they play with Amélia, but they used it appropriately in this new context. When Sara became a pupil she began saying "Yes, it isn't", until Vasco looked at her and said emphatically, "No, it isn't". She repeated his correction to herself and then began using the correct form for the rest of the game. Vasco's correction seems to have assisted Sara's learning as she was observed using this expression confidently during the following English lesson.

Children were also frequently observed scaffolding each other's retelling of stories using picturebooks. They appeared to enjoy doing this activity. In one observation Vasco and Americo were looking at a picturebook called *Pete the Cat* (Litwin and Dean, 2008), which includes a repetitive, rhythmic jazzy song. Americo had memorised bits of the verbal text and began to sing, but he could not remember it all. Excerpt 3 shows how Americo was supported by his peers while he retold the story:

Excerpt 3

Americo: (Singing and swinging his hips) I love my da, da. I love my da, da.

Vasco: (Singing) I love my white shoes. I love my white shoes.

Americo: (Turns the page, looks at the pictures)

Bruno: Oh No! Strawberries!

Vasco: STRAWBERRIES!

Americo: (Turns the page and sings) I love my [pause] (looks at Vasco)

Vasco: (singing) Red shoes.

Vasco and Americo: (Singing) I love my red shoes.

Alone, Americo could not retell the picturebook, but together with Vasco and Bruno he experienced a very positive, supportive moment of engaging with the story language. In subsequent teacher-led sessions with Susana, a visiting storyteller who shared English picturebooks with the children once a week, Americo was noted to be more confident in singing along to the story as she shared it with them.

In the data there are also examples of children asking each other for help. On one occasion, Magda and Alice were playing *Bingo!* with the "Dog can" flashcards. Magda was role-playing the teacher, but needed Alice's help with several expressions. Excerpt 4 is a transcription of part of their dialogue:

Excerpt 4

1. Magda: I'm the best
2. Alice: (Places a cover on her bingo card)
3. Magda: I can swim. Oh, I can hop. Oh Amélia!
4. Sofia: Hop
5. Magda. *Escavar*. I can dig. *E está? Qual é?* [And this one? What is it?] (shows the flashcard representing dance)
6. Alice: Dance
7. Magda: *Olha!* I can dance (mimes dancing)

Notice how in line 3 Magda actually corrects herself: she first refers to swim and then realises the flashcard shows a dog hopping. She chastises herself for making the mistake, "Oh Amélia!", for she is role-playing Amélia, the English teacher. In line 5, "Escavar" means "to dig" - she asks Alice to remind her of the next word which she can't remember. Once prompted, she is able to produce the correct form (line 7).

We believe that these examples of co-operation in language production demonstrate that ELAs can provide a comfortable environment where children feel safe to experiment with the language they are learning. The evidence presented in the examples discussed above indicates that children used English in the ELAs in both Portugal and Korea, and that the resources they find there prompt this exploitation of the new language they are learning. However the resources need to replicate in some way those they use with their English teacher.

7

Conclusion

This small qualitative study was motivated both by our academic and professional interests in very young children's early English language learning, and by the recognition that teaching pedagogy for this age group is undeveloped. The two particular concerns that we were attempting to address are, firstly, that English teaching for this age group is often disassociated from other pre-primary learning, and secondly, that the methodology is teacher-dominated and provides little opportunity for children to experiment and play with and use the language they are learning. The objective of the study was, therefore, to design, trial and evaluate a holistic and integrated approach to the teaching of English at pre-primary level, which combines teacher-led activity and opportunities for children to use the language. A primary focus of attention was given to the ELAs, as we attempted to measure their effectiveness in enhancing English language development in naturally occurring circumstances.

The examination of the data from the interventions in both Portugal and South Korea was very encouraging and provided sufficient evidence to conclude that having a space in the classroom, resourced to remind children of the activities they have engaged in during teacher-led English sessions, does stimulate children's use of English. In summary, the evidence presented indicates that:

1. The ELAs were well used:
 - a. the children played in them frequently.
 - b. they used the resources in their play.
 - c. they used English in their interactions with the resources and other children in the ELA.
2. The ELA resources stimulated memories of the teacher-led English sessions:
 - a. the children re-enacted the teacher-led activities.
 - b. they took on the roles of the teacher and pupil participants.
 - c. they used familiar sequences of English associated with the teacher-led activity.
3. Play in the ELAs prompted experimental use of English:
 - a. the children incorporated their repertoire of English vocabulary into their own imaginative play activity.

We therefore feel confident in suggesting that classroom English learning areas, or ELAs, which are organised and resourced to co-ordinate with teacher-led English activities, are an effective and age appropriate means of facilitating additional opportunities to learn, use and practise the English being taught during classroom sessions.

Final words

During the research project the team was consistently monitoring, assessing and adapting the ELAs to make them inviting and interesting places for the children to be in. From our discussions with the teachers in South Korea and Portugal we agreed that ELAs need to be context specific in order to blend in with the culture and educational practices of the school. However, we also identified certain features of an ELA that seemed paramount to their success in promoting English language development. The following reflections and guidance may be helpful to teachers who are interested in creating and organising an ELA in a classroom as part of an integrated approach to teaching English.

Points to consider when creating and organising a classroom ELA

1. Collaboration

Discussion and joint planning between the English teacher, when peripatetic, and the pre-primary educator, are essential for successful learning. Both teachers can take on responsibility for an aspect of the ELA. For example, the English teacher can provide and organise the resources and the educator can manage the children's use of the ELA and oversee the activities they engage in. Whole school acknowledgement of the ELA as a normal aspect of the classroom learning environment, and parental encouragement of children's use of it, can also contribute to successful use of an ELA.

2. Learning Area

Whether the management of learning areas in the classroom is a carousel system controlled by the teacher, or whether the children have free choice about where they want to be and which type of activity they want to engage in, the ELA should be an attractive, interesting, welcoming and comfortable place to be. Where a permanent and dedicated classroom space for English learning is not available, a special box to contain the English resources can be used instead. The box can be taken out and used on a carpet area or on a table to create a temporary ELA during children's free play activity time.

3. Resources

For an integrated approach to English learning the ELA should contain a set of all the materials used in the teacher-led activities. These can be bought or made but need to be durable to withstand frequent use. Children can be involved in making sets of materials, for example, by colouring images for flashcards. The ELA can also contain other resources which represent English in their culture and which might promote an association with English speakers.

4. Play

An attractive, comfortable and well-resourced ELA should provide a catalyst for play activity in which children's English language learning can be extended and strengthened. This learning might be demonstrated in different ways, for example, by practising English vocabulary in solitary play, by imitating discourse patterns used in the teacher-led activity in co-operative play and by creating new ways of using familiar language in imaginative play. What seems to be important is that the children are stimulated by the richness of the learning environment and are allowed freedom to organise and lead their own play activity.

5. Progression

Observing children playing in ELAs can provide information that can be used by teachers to assess the English language development of the children and to plan for progression.

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Appendix A: Instructions for games

Encounter	
Listen and Do!	Teacher and children agree on an action which represents the words they are playing with. Teacher calls out one of the words embedded in an expression eg. Dog can jump and the children repeat the word and do the accompanying mine.
STOP!	Same as Listen and Do! But when the teacher says STOP! the children freeze, as though they are statues. If a child moves, or is the last to freeze, the teacher says, You moved! Sit down. The game finishes when a small group of children, has managed to remain still at every call of 'STOP!'. The teacher counts how many winners there are.

Engage	
What's missing?	Teacher places the flashcards on the floor face up and says, Close your eyes. Teacher takes a flashcard away and says, Open your eyes. Teacher shows mock surprise! A card is missing, which one is it? Either the whole group can chorus which flashcard is missing, or get the children put their hand up if they know and select one child to respond. Ensure over time that children become the leader, giving instructions and taking a flashcard away.
The pair game	Place two flashcards of each image on the floor or on the board, picture side down. Each child has a go at turning over two flashcards, trying to find a matching pair. As each card is turned over the child should say the word or expression on the card. If they can't remember they should ask for help, Help, please! If the child succeeds in finding a matching pair, the flashcards remain in place, with the images showing. You can say, Yes, they are the same. If they don't match say, They are different and then turn them over again. As you play this game encourage children to use this language too.

Exploit	
Telephone game	Teacher whispers a word or expression to a child and the whisper is passed around the group. If a child doesn't hear or understand they are encouraged to say Repeat please! When the last child receives the whisper, they say it out loud. If it is the same word that began the game the children are congratulated on listening so well. If it has changed they are encouraged to have another go and to listen carefully.
Guess the flashcard	Hold the flashcards to your chest so the children can't see. Select one. For the I'm the best flashcards get the children to ask questions, Can dog jump? You respond using No, he can't! Yes, he can! When a child has guessed the flashcard they come to the front and select a card for the class to guess.
Guess what I can do	Hold the flashcards to your chest so the children can't see. Select one. For the children to ask questions, Can you jump? You respond using No, I can't! Yes, I can! When a child has guessed the flashcard they come to the front and select a card for the class to guess. Encourage the children to respond using No, I can't or Yes, I can
Think say and do	If children have been exposed to different animal words, ask them to think about what these animals can do. In turn they come to the front of the class and mime the animal, then make a sentence, eg A frog can jump.
BINGO!	To play BINGO! the children are asked to work in pairs. Each pair gets a bingo grid and six covers (these can be cut pieces of card, bottle tops, beans, buttons etc) A child in each pair is given all six covers and is asked to share them fairly, encourage language like Three for me, and three for you! Teacher goes around the class indicating which child is responsible for the top or bottom row. Say, You are on the [top] row! Call out the words or expressions, eg Dog can [swim]. If children have the image they cover it and say, Yes! If they don't have it they say, No! When all six pictures are covered the pair calls out Bingo! As children become confident individual children or pairs of children should come to the front and call out the words and expressions for their classmates.
The board game	For the board game you will need a large sheet of paper or cloth, marked out six squares by four. Making a total of 24 squares to play with. The first square is the start and the last is the finish. You will also need a large die or number spinner. (see Figure 0) Place flashcards from several units of work on the remaining squares. As you do this you could count or say the words/ expressions with the children. Divide the class into four groups and give each group a counter - any small toy works well. A child in each team takes turn to throw the die. They should be encouraged to say / count the number on the die, and place their team's counter on a square. Here they should say name the flashcard. If they can't remember, they ask their team for help using Help please! If no one knows then they go back to where they were. The first team to reach the end of the game is the winner. The game normally takes about 20 minutes. The teacher should use language such as Your turn! Throw the dice! What number is it? Can you count? What is it? Can you remember? On no! Back you go! Yes, well remembered!

Appendix B

Unit of work: 'I'm the Best' by Lucy Cousins

Author / illustrator – Lucy Cousins

Publisher – Walker Books

Resources used in these lessons can be found in Appendix C

Summary

I'm the Best is a story about dog who thinks he's the best. He has four friends who he loves, but that doesn't stop him telling them he can do things better than they can. It turns out that they teach him a lesson, in a kind way, and he realizes that it's important for everyone to have that 'I'm the best' feeling!

A description of the book, with page spreads can be found in the following blog post: <http://picturebooksinelt.blogspot.pt/2011/02/im-in-love-with-me.html>

Unit of work objectives

- To foster the recognition that everyone is good at something.
- To develop children's self-confidence in understanding and using English.
- To provide opportunities for children to talk about themselves eg 'I can run'
- To provide opportunities for children use English in context during activities and games
- To enable children to enjoy a story and begin to retell parts confidently
- To help children invent a chant with actions
- To make an 'I'm the best' rosette to take home to share with family and friends.

Suggested age:

4-6 years

Language focus:

Dog, ladybird, mole, goose, donkey, friend

Dog can ...; I can ...; Can you...?; Yes, I can. No, I can't.

Run, jump, swim, dig, fly, hop, walk, dance

I'm the best!

I'm ...

Big, small, happy, sad

Teaching aids:

Dog action flashcards; Dog emotion flashcards; animal flashcards; picturebook 'I'm the Best!'; 'I'm the best' bingo cards; 'I'm the best' board game, dice and counters; rosette template, inks, straws and pipettes.

Lesson 1	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To meet Dog and share what they know about dogs generally. To learn what Dog can do.
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly Can you jump? Yes, I can. I can jump.
Activities:	Listen and do Stop
ELA resources	Dog can ... flashcards X 2

Lesson 2	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language in context. To use previously learned language (animals)
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk I can [jump] ... like a [crocodile]
Activities:	STOP! What's missing? Chant: 'I can ... ' Telephone game Mime game: Guess what Dog can do?
ELA resources	Rebus version of chant

Lesson 3	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language more confidently To engage in a story using the language they have been playing with To reflect upon Dog's actions To use previously learned language (emotions, size)
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk I can [run]! I'm the best How does [Dog] feel? [Dog] is [happy]
Activities:	STOP! What's missing? Chant 'I can ... ' The pair game Sharing the story and discussion
ELA resources	The picturebook 'I'm the best!'

Lesson 4	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language more confidently Enjoy and join in the story To talk about what they can do.
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk I can [run]! I'm the best [Dog] is [happy] I can [jump] ... like a [crocodile] Can you [run]? Yes, I can! No, I can't!
Activities:	STOP! Chant 'I can ...' Sharing the story Guess what I can do Telephone game
ELA resources	Telephone

Lesson 5	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language more confidently To invent a new chant To use previously learned language To talk about what they can do To cooperate in pairs
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk [Dog] is [happy] I can swim like a [crocodile] I can run! I'm the best. Can you [run]? Yes, I can! No, I can't! Yes! No!
Activities:	Chant 'I can ...' with different animals Sharing the story Think, say and do Bingo Telephone game
ELA resources	Bingo cards (X4) and covers (X24)

Lesson 6	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language more confidently To talk about what they can do
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk. [Dog] is [happy] I can swim like a [crocodile] I can run! I'm the best Can you [run]? Yes, I can! No, I can't!
Activities:	Chant 'I can ...' What's missing? Guess what I can do The pair game Sharing the story
ELA resources	As for previous lessons

Session 7	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language confidently To use previously learned language (shapes, colours, emotions, numbers) To play in a team and help peers
Language:	Dog can run, dog can swim, dog can jump, dog can hop, dog can dance, and ladybird can fly, dog can dig, dog can walk Dog is [sad] I can [swim] like a [crocodile] I'm the best It's a [shape] It's [colour] Numbers 1 – 6 My turn Help please!
Activities:	Chant 'I can ...' Play a board game We can win tomorrow chant
ELA resources	The board game (A4), dice and counters

Session 8	
Objective: To provide opportunities for children	To use the focus language confidently To use previously learned language (colours) To develop fine motor skills and blowing capacity To talk about what they can do To develop understanding of different media
Language:	I can [swim]. I'm the best! I want [red] please. I've finished! Help please!
Activities:	Drawing a picture Blowing ink to make a colourful rosette
ELA resources	Children's rosettes as decorations

Resources

1. **Flashcards** – created by Sandie Mourão based on Lucy Cousins' character, Dog (See Appendix C)

2. **Chant** adapted from:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb8IZalZw_M

Jump, jump, I can jump (X3) Like a frog.
Walk, walk, I can walk (X3) Like a lion.
Swim, swim, I can swim (X3) Like a fish.

3. **Rebus chant** – (See Appendix D)

4. **Bingo cards** – (See Appendix E)

5. **Board game (A4)** – (See Appendix F)

6. **Examples of rosettes** – (See Appendix G)

Appendix C: Flashcards










Appendix D: Rebus chant

'I can ...' - a rebus chant




Like a .

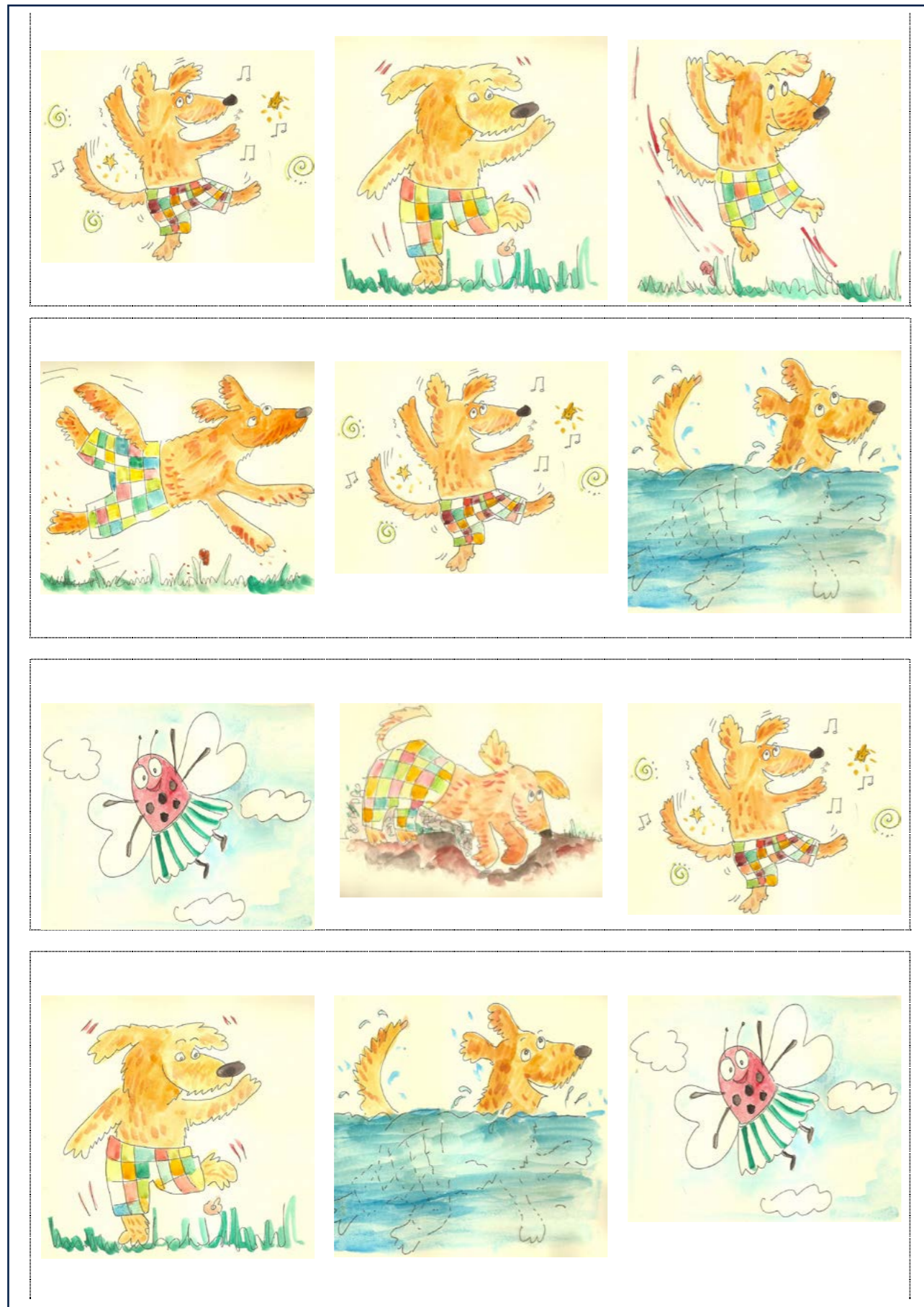


Like a .



Like a .

Appendix D: Rebus chant

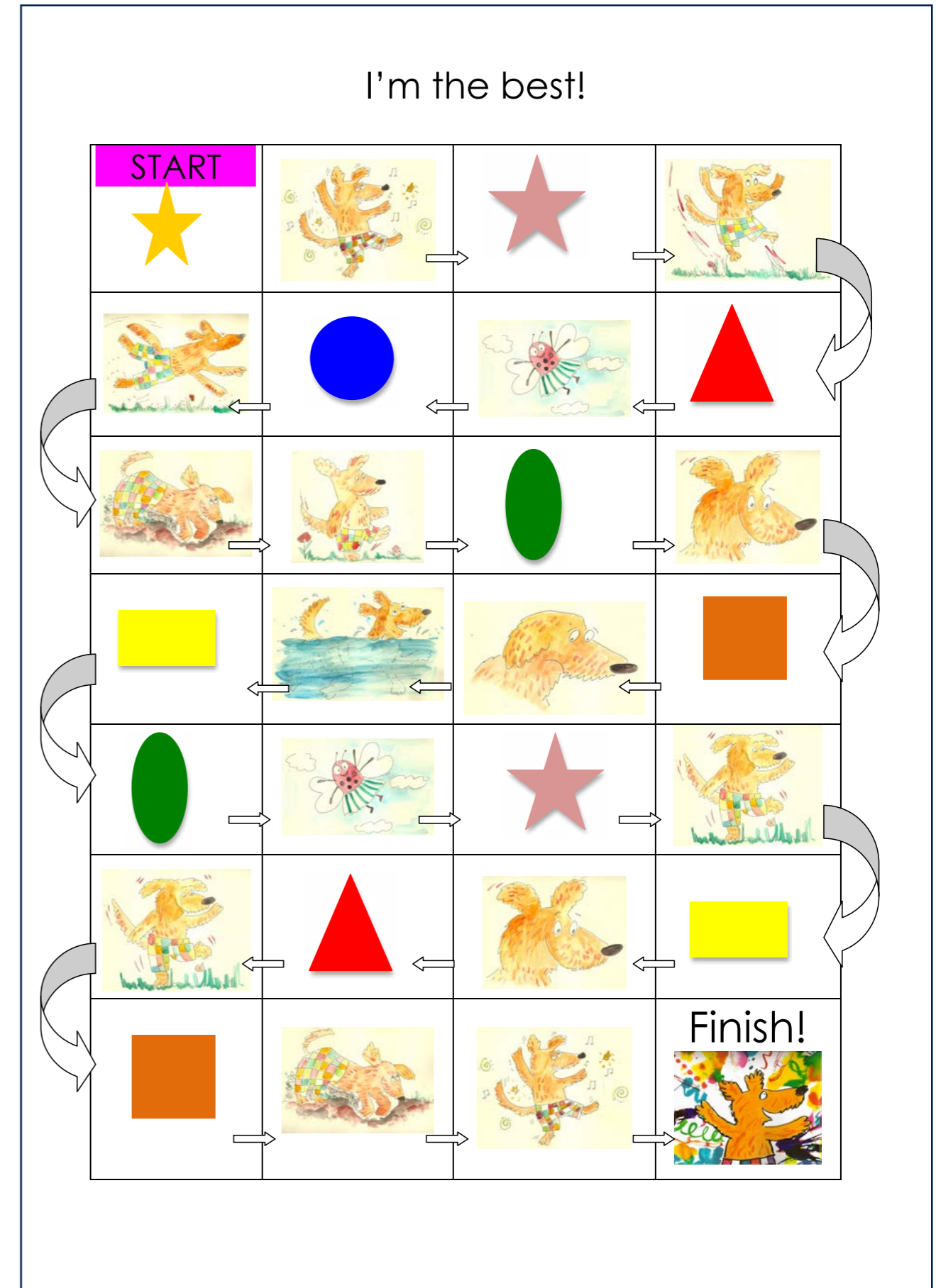


Appendix E: Bingo! cards





Appendix F: Board game



Appendix G: Examples of rosettes



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