

MASARYK UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education



**Osvojování cizího jazyka
v raném věku**

**Foreign Language Acquisition
at an Early Age**

Proceedings from the conference organised and hosted by

Faculty of Education, Masaryk University

on March 16, 2006

Editors: Světlana Hanušová and Petr Najvar

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FOREWORD

Second Language Acquisition as an interdisciplinary field aimed at the description and explanation of the process of foreign language learning and the study of factors affecting it, has been developing dynamically since the 1970s. Nevertheless, there are still many more questions than answers in the area of foreign language learning.

Due to the necessity to enhance the communicative competence of the Czech population, the optimum starting age is often discussed as the key to success in foreign language learning. There are, however, research results which indicate that the role of an early start should not be overestimated, and which point to more important characteristics of the learning process.

The conference entitled Foreign Language Acquisition at an Early Age was co-organized by the Department of the English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno, AMATE (Association of Teacher Educators) and the Educational Research Centre at the Faculty of Education, MU on March 16, 2006. Mary S. Benedetti, EdD. and Penny Freppon, EdD. of the University of Cincinnati and a prominent Slovak psycholinguist doc. PhDr. Gabriela Lojová, Ph.D. accepted the invitation to present keynote papers.

These proceedings present all the contributions in the conference language, i.e. English. The keynote papers are translated into Czech and Slovak respectively and the discussion papers are supplemented with extended summaries in Czech.

The contributors analysed the factor of age from different angles. They all indicate that the greatest contribution to the success of early instruction is a qualified teacher. The younger the pupil, the more significant the qualification of the teacher, not only in terms of the communicative competence in the target language, but also in terms of psychological and pedagogical education. Without fulfilling this basic prerequisite, the introduction of foreign languages into early grades of primary school cannot bring the desired benefits.

Editors

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PŘEDMLUVA

Interdisciplinární obor nazvaný *Second Language Acquisition (Osvojování druhého jazyka)*, který se zabývá popisem a vysvětlením procesu osvojování nemateřského jazyka a studuje faktory, které tento proces ovlivňují, se dynamicky rozvíjí od 70. let 20. století. V oblasti osvojování cizího jazyka však stále existuje mnohem více otázek než odpovědí.

V souvislosti s nutností zlepšit komunikativní kompetence české populace se často hovoří o faktoru raného věku, který bývá považován za jeden z klíčů k úspěchu. Řada výzkumů však hovoří proti přeceňování tohoto faktoru a upozorňuje na jiné, významnější charakteristiky procesu učení, které vedou k úspěšnému zvládnutí cizího jazyka.

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity uspořádala 16. března 2006 ve spolupráci se sdružením metodiků angličtiny AMATE a Centrem pedagogického výzkumu Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity konferenci nazvanou *Osvojování cizího jazyka v raném věku*. Pozvání přednést hlavní referáty přijaly americké kolegyně Mary S. Benedetti, EdD. a Penny Freppon, EdD z University of Cincinnati a přední slovenská psycholingvistka doc. PhDr. Gabriela Lojová, Ph.D. z Univerzity Komenského v Bratislavě.

Sborník z konference přináší znění příspěvků v konferenčním jazyce, kterým byla angličtina. Hlavní příspěvky jsou přeloženy také do češtiny a slovenštiny, ostatní příspěvky jsou doplněny delším českým resumé.

Ačkoli diskutující analyzovali faktor věku z různých úhlů pohledu, všichni se shodují na tom, že nejdůležitějším faktorem úspěchu cizojazyčné výuky je kvalifikovaný učitel. Čím mladší je žák, který se učí cizímu jazyku, tím důležitější je kvalifikace pedagoga, a to jak po stránce komunikativní kompetence v cílovém jazyce, tak i po stránce pedagogicko-psychologické vybavenosti. Bez splnění této základní podmínky nemůže zavádění výuky cizích jazyků do stále nižších ročníků základní školy přinést očekávané výsledky.

Editoři

Masarykova Univerzita, Brno

listopad 2006

KEYNOTE PAPERS

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A CAUTIONARY TALE

Mary S. Benedetti & Penny A. Freppon

***Abstract:** The curriculum is a social artifact; its concept and models are influenced by various contextual and paradigmatic frames, the curricular theory being of praxiological character. The first part of this paper discusses paradigm alterations, in curricular theories and research in the U.S.A. The second part briefly summarises the alterations of the curricular model in the process of the transformation of the Czech educational system, and refers to its deficiencies and thus dangers when forming the basic school curriculum. These are possible subjects of further educational research.*

Educational policy-makers internationally are implementing plans designed to extend foreign language instruction into the earliest levels of schooling, which represents a shift away from the longstanding tradition of commencing such instruction to children in early adolescence. While the motivations for this change – be they political, economic, or educational – are generally positive, they often do not take into account the myriad cognitive, psychological, and affective characteristics of young children, nor do they consider the extremely important practical factors that determine the success of programs of this type. This, then, is a cautionary tale, one that reviews what years of research and practice show about FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) and outlines the conditions necessary for early-age language learning.

First, however, some discussion of the approaches to FLES is required. In Europe and North America, various types of FLES programs exist. Among these are Sequential FLES, in which children study the same foreign language for two or more consecutive years, with the foreign language generally taught as a separate “subject”; Content-Enriched FLES, which utilizes content area (e.g. social studies, science, literature) learning to augment foreign language acquisition; Partial Immersion, in which content areas are taught in the target (foreign) language for a certain percentage of each school day; Total Immersion, in which all content is taught in the target language; Two-Way or Bilingual Immersion, in which children develop skills in the first language (L1) and second language (L2) simultaneously; and FLEX, which exposes children to a variety of foreign languages over the academic year (Kaiser,

1996). The theoretical bases and, more importantly, the goals of these types of programs, differ and must be considered in any curricular plan.

The evidence that most policy-makers do not consider factors other than wishful thinking in the implementation of FLES programs is evidenced in these programs' basis in the empirically disproved but popular myth that children are "better" language learners than adults. The only area in which young children outperform adult learners is in the development of native-like pronunciation and articulation, certainly an important aspect of second language acquisition (SLA) but by no means essential for communicative competence. Research indicates that adolescents and adults have cognitive advantages over children in language learning: They have more highly developed first language (L1) skills; they are better able to compare and contrast L1 and target language (TL) structures and concepts; they are more proficient at generalizing and at recognizing anomalies; and they are cognitively better able to reflect upon their learning.

Beginning foreign language instruction in the early grades does have some advantages, however. As Kaiser (1996) points out, cognitively and physiologically, elementary students are not ideal language learners, but they may have affective advantages over older learners. These affective advantages may be due to children's lower "affective filter," (or lower level of affective barriers to learning such as anxiety, self-consciousness, or fear of failure, as posited by Krashen, 1981). Furthermore, there is some evidence that FLES may positively impact children's cognitive skills, evaluation skills, non-verbal problem solving, figural creativity, self-esteem, sense of cultural pluralism, tolerance of differences, and performance in later FL study (Kaiser, 1996). While the last of these alone may appear to be sufficient justification for the implementation of FLES programs, the political, social, and educational factors necessary for successful FLES may obviate this rationale.

What, then, are the factors required for successful FLES? Not surprisingly, the critical condition for success is a well-articulated policy, developed by qualified educational experts (researchers and practitioners), resulting in a theoretically sound program based on current research and appropriate to the socio-educational context; this policy cannot be developed solely in response to internal or external sociopolitical pressures or designed to benefit any political group or entity. In other words,

- the program must align with theory and research;
- the program must fit within the existing socio-educational context;
- the political rationale for the program should not be permitted to affect these conditions.

Lessons Learned

The United States can provide many examples of unsuccessful FLES programs. This may be due in large part to the unique structure of the educational system in the U.S., in which the federal government has historically played an extremely limited role in the implementation – although not necessarily in the development – of policies.

Funding for elementary (primary) and secondary schools in the U.S. is almost exclusively a state/local responsibility, with only 8% of educational funds originating with the federal government (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Decisions regarding curriculum and methodology are, in theory, made solely at the state or local level, as the federal government is prohibited by law from involvement in these decisions. However, the federal government's influence on state and local educational policy is significantly disproportionate to the amount of money it provides; since state and local funding must be approved by the citizens of the districts in elections, and as most voters are reluctant to increase their tax burden to support schools, the 8% of funding provided by the federal government is often the only secure source of support upon which a school system can depend. Thus, in general, what the federal Department of Education wants schools to do, they do. The Department of Education claims that

There are no unfunded federal education 'mandates'. Every federal education law is conditioned on a state or other grantee's decision to accept federal program funds. Federal education program 'requirements' are not unfunded mandates because the conditions in federal law apply only when a state (or other grantee) voluntarily chooses to accept federal funds. Any state that does not want to abide by a federal program's requirements can simply choose not to accept the federal funds associated with that program. While most states choose to accept and use federal program funds, in the past, a few states have forgone funds for various reasons. (U.S. Department of Education, 2005)

There is no question that the federal government's concern about the growth of power in foreign political states in the 1950s and 1960s, and the U.S. Department of Education's subsequent focus on foreign language instruction, was the primary motivation behind the explosion of FLES programs in public and private schools. Unfortunately, these programs tended to be politically motivated; were rapidly designed and implemented; lacked articulation between elementary and secondary programs; used inappropriate methodology; promised unrealistic results; and suffered from a serious shortage of qualified teachers (Lipton, 1998). Additional problems identified by Curtain and Dahlberg (2000) included "Scheduling foreign language

classes too infrequently or in sessions that [were] too short. ... Treating foreign languages differently from other academic subjects. ... Offering only commonly taught languages, without considering other important world languages. ... Ignoring the needs of students who enter the program in later grades. ... Planning and scheduling the foreign language program in isolation from the general curriculum. ... [and] Planning schedules and workloads that [led] to teacher burnout” (pp. 2-6). Heining-Boynton (1990) also notes the lack of parental support and the lack of homework, grades and evaluation in her critique of FLES programs during this era.

Ultimately, the political motivation (i.e. pressure from the Department of Education to create programs without sufficient preparation, resources, research, and funding) for these programs was insufficient to sustain them. The political result of the failure of these FLES programs was a decrease in funding; the social result was a general disillusion with FLES. By the mid 1970s, few FLES programs remained in the schools.

One positive outcome of the FLES experiments of these years was the wealth of well-designed empirical research studies on the conditions necessary for successful programs. As Lipton (1998) points out, “The precursors of the past have indeed provided the historical perspective for the teaching of foreign languages in the elementary school” (p. 13). This emphasis on research and evaluation continues as FLES programs once again expand in the United States. The research conducted over the past four decades can be summarized fairly simply:

- Successful programs have specific, identifiable characteristics;
- Qualified teachers are central to program success;
- Qualified teachers have a specific body of knowledge and skills.

Characteristics of Successful FLES Programs

A synthesis of four studies regarding the conditions necessary for successful FLES programs reveals remarkable similarities in results, even though research methodologies and goals vary widely: Based on her many years of teaching and research, Lipton (1991) predicts (overoptimistically) the state of FLES in the year 2000, outlining the ideal conditions for successful programs; Girard (1996) re-examines and updates the empirical results of his 1974 study, requested by the French Ministry of Education, and his 1992 study, conducted in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom; Kaiser (1996) presents a thorough review of the North American research on the efficacy of FLES programs; and Gilzow (2002) summarizes the results of a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in the late 1990s that identified common characteristics of

successful FLES programs in seven schools in Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Connecticut, Maryland, Ohio, and Oregon. Comparing the recommendations and conclusions of these reports to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) list of “characteristics of effective elementary school foreign language programs” illustrates these commonalities:

Characteristic 1: “Program Goals and Program Intensity: Program goals are consistent with the amount of time actually provided for instruction” (ACTFL). Girard (1996) refers to this as “adequate scheduling,” while Kaiser (1996) calls for setting realistic and appropriate goals and planning a program that will meet those goals.

Characteristic 2: “Extended Sequence: Elementary and middle/junior high school foreign language programs are the foundation for a long, well-articulated sequence of carefully developed curricula that extend through grade 12” (ACTFL). Girard (1996) calls this characteristic “continuity.”

Characteristic 3: “Articulation: Articulation of the extended sequence is both vertical and horizontal, including the elementary school, the middle/junior high school, and the high school. This articulation is the result of consensus, careful planning, and monitoring among language teachers, administrators, and parents at all levels...” (ACTFL). All four studies (Gilzow, 2002; Girard, 1996; Kaiser, 1996; and Lipton, 1991) emphasize the importance of this factor.

Characteristic 4: “Curriculum; Human, fiscal and time resources are available for systematic curriculum development. The curriculum review cycle provides for assessment” (ACTFL). None of the four studies mentions curriculum specifically, but they do discuss materials, methods, and evaluation (see below). It may be that the authors believe this to be assumed, given their other recommendations.

Characteristic 5: “Instruction: Instruction is appropriate to the developmental level of the students and consistent with program outcomes and current professional practices” (ACTFL). Both Gilzow (2002) and Kaiser (1996) discuss effective teaching methods and add a focus on content (content-based instruction); Gilzow (2002) and Lipton (1991) also call for the appropriate use of technology.

Characteristic 6: “Materials: Materials [are] appropriate for students’ developmental level, rich in authentic culture and language, and related to the curriculum” (ACTFL). Girard (1996) and Lipton (1991) echo this recommendation exactly; it is implied in Kaiser’s (1996) call for content-based instruction.

Characteristic 7: “Evaluation: Processes for evaluating both student achievement and program success are in use” (ACTFL). All four reports reflect this same conclusion, with Girard (1996) calling for “integrated evaluation and quality control.”

Characteristic 8: “Staffing: Programs are staffed by certified teachers who have completed preparation in methods and materials for elementary school foreign language instruction, developmental characteristics of the elementary school learner, and the nature of the elementary school curriculum. Teachers should have a high level of language and cultural competence. Based on the ACTFL/ETS proficiency scale, a teacher’s oral proficiency in a foreign language should be ‘Advanced’” (ACTFL). This is another characteristic emphasized by all four researchers. While Girard (1996), Kaiser (1996) (locating and retaining qualified teachers), and Lipton (1991) specifically list highly qualified teachers as one of the components of successful programs in their reports, this factor is implied throughout the characteristics discussed by Gilzow (2002) and is more thoroughly discussed in Gilzow and Rhodes (2000).

Characteristic 9: “Professional Development: An ongoing program of professional development should allow teachers to advance in their levels of language, culture, and instruction” (ACTFL). Girard (1996), Gilzow (2002), and Lipton (1991) all highlight the importance of this factor.

Characteristic 10: “School and Community Support and Development: The foreign language teachers work with the entire school community to integrate the foreign language curriculum into the school educational program” (ACTFL). Kaiser (1996) calls for cultivating parent and community awareness and support; Gilzow (2002) mentions advocacy.

Characteristic 11: “Culture: The connection between language and culture is made explicit, and foreign language instruction is implemented within a cultural context. Cultural awareness and understanding are explicit goals of the program” (ACTFL). Interestingly, only the oldest of the four studies (Lipton, 1991) specifically calls for the inclusion of culture, although this factor may be implied in the lists developed by the other three authors.

In addition to the 11 characteristics outlined above, Lipton (1991) predicts that changing certification procedures, increasing and sustaining research on FLES, fostering collegiality among primary, secondary, and tertiary educators, and developing formal support and networking systems for teachers will be critical to FLES program success. Gilzow discusses compliance with National Foreign Language Standards and funding as additional factors.

Characteristics of Successful FLES Teachers

The importance of highly qualified teachers is a recurrent theme in FLES research. Peyton (1997) reviews the literature on the characteristics of effective FL teachers and concludes that successful teachers need:

- A high level of language proficiency in all of the modalities of the target language – speaking, listening, reading, and writing;
- The ability to use the language in real-life contexts, for both social and professional purposes;
- The ability to comprehend contemporary media in the foreign language, both oral and written, and interact successfully with native speakers in the United States and abroad (Phillips, 1991);
- A strong background in the liberal arts and the content areas.
- Understanding of the social, political, historical, and economic realities of the regions where the language they teach is spoken.
- Pedagogical knowledge and skills, including knowledge about human growth and development, learning theory and second language acquisition theory, and a repertoire of strategies for developing proficiency and cultural understanding in all students (Guntermann, 1992).
- Knowledge of the various technologies and how to integrate them into their instruction. (pp. 3-4)

Constructivism and the Communicative approach

Constructivism and the communicative approach both hold that learning is active. This means that children must be positioned in active roles in learning a foreign language and they must be carefully guided. This is also true of children learning a second language. Importantly, our remarks are drawn primarily from American literature that is grounded in a second language learning perspective, which is far easier than learning a foreign language. In second language learning children are surrounded by the new language. In the U.S. this language is English. English is spoken in most homes, in schools, and in all avenues of the community and media and it is printed in mainstream newspapers, books and magazines. Thus, children in the U.S. who are often native Spanish speakers are immersed in English. A great deal of incidental and direct learning occurs this way. Being “surrounded by” the new language greatly supports the teaching process.

In contrast, when children in the Czech Republic are taught a foreign language, learning is much more challenging. Especially when children have not yet developed sufficient cognitive skills, nor sufficient expertise in reading and writing in their own language before they are asked to learn a foreign language.

Thus the age at which children are taught foreign languages in Czech schools is vital. This point will be expanded on shortly. But prior to this, some additional discussion on the teachers' practice is called for.

Practical Implications

In classrooms grounded in the constructivist/communicative theory, teachers initially provide strong support and then gradually release responsibility to the students. One implication of this is that tasks should not be so simple as to bore the child, and not so difficult as to “build in” failure. Young children's learning must be safe and feel safe since failure destroys motivation and risks real harm to their self-esteem. To help ensure learning, and to foster the intrinsic motivation needed to learn, learning tasks are accomplished with the “scaffolding” that the teacher designs and implements constantly in lessons. The following principles of scaffolding are from Tharp and Galimore (1995).

(S1) Engage in joint problem solving: Involve children in meaningful activity. Help children learn by doing.

Children should participate in hands-on activities such as those that involve sorting and creating categories for words in the mother tongue and in the foreign language.

(S2) Stay in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Organize activities that are challenging for children, but achievable by them with assistance.

(S3) Build Intersubjectivity: Come to shared understanding and work toward a shared goal.

Engage in “grand conversations” with children and ask meaningful questions; help them solve problems through oral and written language.

(S4) Maintain warmth and responsiveness: Create a positive emotional tone; provide verbal praise; attribute competence to the child.

Using instructional talk that prompts children to talk, the successful teacher encourages children to approximate the correct usage and celebrates each small step toward native speaker language. Total Physical Response (TPR) is widely acknowledged as an effective approach with beginners and can be

used as a supplementary teaching technique throughout language learning instruction.

(S5) Promote self-regulation: Step back and let children take control of their own activity; provide assistance as needed to support children’s problem solving.

This scaffolding is often challenging for teachers who tend to “teach too much” and fail to provide for children’s self-selection and practice. Practice is not limited to only correct responses, but rather, to partially correct responses and effortful engagement. Importantly, practice is not testing, but rather is “risk free” and a place in which children can learn from their own experimentation and from their peers. Moreover, these practice sessions should be lively with children’s talk and activity. See Crawford (2005) and Freppon (2001) for further discussion.

As indicated above, meaningful classroom activities and peer and teacher collaborations contribute to learning communities. Successful classroom communities are culturally responsive and lively with talk, reading, writing and drawing.

The theoretical grounding for the kinds of classrooms and foreign language instruction recommended in our discussion is based also on Vygotsky’s (1978) work. He held that knowledge is socially constructed and that a “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) is crucial to learning. *What the child can do today with help/collaboration, she can do independently tomorrow.*

Schema theory

The field of cognitive psychology provided schema theory as a way to better understand learning. Schema theory holds that learners have basic concepts, or prior knowledge upon which they draw as they construct new knowledge. This leads to foreign language teaching in which instruction is based on themes and topics which children are already familiar with. Again, this well-respected and validated view places students in highly active roles with a good deal of understanding. Even the youngest student is far from an “empty vessel.”

Successful teachers access and build on what students know and support students in “making sense” of the foreign language.

Constructivist learning theory applies to literature. Here students respond subjectively and critically using their schemas to make sense as they begin to speak, read and write the foreign language. Reading and writing the foreign language can be taught simultaneously with speaking the foreign language

(using TPR) if it is done gradually and kept in the ZPD so that children succeed. The focus then is on teaching, not testing.

Assessments may be done informally and formatively so long as they do not threaten the developing language learner with failure. Assessments should be used to guide instruction and help teachers decide when to intervene and provide more support, or “back up” instruction to a place in which the child succeeds. Then teachers gradually introduce more challenging learning according to increasingly successful learning.

Reader Response

The work of Louise Rosenblatt (1978) is known for advancing reader response theory. This theory stresses the role of the reader in constructing meaning. As children advance in learning their mother tongue and the foreign language they are encouraged to form interpretations of texts in both a literary and critical sense. Good teachers acknowledge students’ own agency in making meaning. Teachers are key in teaching new skills, vocabulary, and concepts. To do this they work to connect children’s personal responses to new learning.

Metacognitive Learning

Rooted in Ogden and Richard’s (1923) work on learning and more recent cognitive science research, we understand that children’s awareness of their own learning processes are critical in their successful learning. Thus, when a child balks at a word, rather than thinking this child has failed to recognize the word, the teacher sees that the child may well understand that she does not recognize the word readily and is therefore hesitant. This kind of learner response is viewed as a sign of progress and with collaborative encouragement/scaffolding from the teacher the child is enabled to speak the word.

The learning theories discussed above support the idea that while learning products (outcomes) are still important, crucial emphasis is placed on the process of learning and meaning construction. Construction of meaning is an activity of children and they can be taught to perform this more efficiently. They come to metacognitive awareness through cognitive apprenticeship as noted above in this discussion of the social nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Teaching methods

Some methods/techniques that help support language learning are:

- Teachers and peers model and demonstrate learning processes using think aloud protocols and graphic organizers. See Crawford (2005) for discussion.
- Writing to learn. Writing, talking about writing, and representing language in print profoundly affects the way we think. Luria's (1976) research indicated that people who could not read and write tended to be unable to reason beyond concrete experience.

The field of foreign language learning is conflicted about the “correct age” at which to begin teaching the foreign language. Research on second language learning in the U.S. indicate that unless second language learning begins very early, for example, between infancy and three or four years of age, it should not be taught until after the child has matured in her own mother tongue. In my view, based on the knowledge we now have, it is reasonable to assume that the same is true of foreign language learning.

During kindergarten, first and second grades children are maturing in their own language and developing important cognitive skills. It is critical that adequate support is provided in these formative years for the child's first oral and written language learning. Children then are more likely to become adults who read and write and have the capacity to record their own ideas, debate them, and push beyond the present state of thinking.

Education for Social Responsibility

Socially responsible students are not passive. They “become” better citizens through classrooms that support collaborative, meaning-based, active communities of learning. Social responsibility is learned in the acquisition of cognitive skills, and it is also acquired in attitudes expressed in things such as empathy and self-efficacy.

As John Dewey wrote, “If we train children to take orders, to do things because they are told to, and fail to give them confidence to ... think for themselves we are putting an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of overcoming our present defect (Dewey, 1915, p 304).

In the following remarks we rely on research on second language learning conducted in the U.S. As noted above we believe that these guidelines are also applicable to foreign language learning.

- Before children are asked to learn to read and write in L2 they need to have acquired adequate fluency in understanding oral L2, be speaking L2 somewhat fluently as well as reading and writing confidently in their mother tongue.

- Collier's (1987) research indicates that students from ages 9 – 11 were the fastest achievers in learning L2.

- For students in early grades (K, 1st, 2nd and for some children 3rd) competent literacy teachers need to “get new readers/writers off to a good beginning” in their mother tongue.

- When children are literate in their mother tongue, reading can be taught in L2 through methods that are highly accessible, such as the Key Vocabulary approach and later, the Language Experience Approach (LEA) (Stauffer, 1975; Crawford, Allen, Hall, 1995).

Teachers should proceed with caution if they adapt these methods/ techniques in teaching English as a foreign language. If such instruction is not begun until a solid foundation is build through the Total Physical Response method, we think a gradual implementation of key vocabulary, the language experience approach, the cloze procedure, and others noted above may work well for Czech children and their success in learning English. And nothing succeeds like success!

In conclusion, we hope that some of the ideas discussed above that are known to work well in teaching English as a second language in the U.S. may inspire discussion about their application to teaching foreign languages.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that FLES programs could be among the most innovative and educationally productive initiatives in our elementary/primary schools. It is equally obvious, however, that successful FLES programs require thoughtful planning and preparation. The resurgence of FLES programs in the United States since the 1990s and the continuation and growth of these programs in Europe – with their concurrent research and evaluation components – offer great promise for the future of language education. Those considering the implementation of FLES programs would be wise to learn from past and current research that indicates the critical necessity for sound policy, sound practice, and the immediate availability of well-prepared teachers skilled in both foreign language education and general pedagogy. To ignore the cautionary tales is to develop a program with little hope of success.

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In the paper, we draw directly on *How children learn: A statement of first principles*, a manual prepared for the Reading and Writing For Critical Thinking Project, written by Charles Temple, Kurt Meredith, & Jeannie Steele.

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VÝUKA CIZÍCH JAZYKŮ V PRIMÁRNÍ ŠKOLE: VAROVNÉ HLASY

Mary S. Benedetti & Penny A. Freppon

Abstrakt: *Kurikulum je sociálním artefaktem; jeho koncept a modely jsou ovlivněny různými kontextuálními a paradigmatickými rámci, přičemž kurikulární teorie má praxeologickou povahu. První část příspěvku se zamýšlí nad paradigmatickými změnami v kurikulárních teoriích a zmiňuje výsledky výzkumů v USA. Druhá část příspěvku sumarizuje změny kurikulárního modelu v procesu transformace českého vzdělávacího systému a referuje o jeho problémech a tím i nebezpečích při formování kurikula základní školy. Tato problematika se může stát předmětem dalšího vzdělávacího výzkumu.*

Tvůrci vzdělávací politiky v různých zemích plánují rozšíření výuky cizích jazyků do velmi raných fází školní docházky, což představuje odklon od zavedené tradice začínat s touto výukou u dětí na prahu dospívání. Ať už tuto změnu motivují aspekty politické, ekonomické či výchovně-vzdělávací, jde o motivaci převážně pozitivní, která však často nebere v úvahu nesčetné kognitivní, psychologické a emoční charakteristické rysy dětí a nezapomíná se ani velmi důležitými praktickými faktory, které zaručují úspěšnost takových programů. Tento text je tedy jakýmsi varováním shrnujícím výsledky dlouholetého výzkumu i praktického ověřování programu FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School – Cizí jazyk v primárním vzdělávání) v USA a vymezujícím podmínky nezbytné pro výuku cizího jazyka v raném věku.

Nejprve však k pojetí programu FLES. V Evropě a v Severní Americe existují různé typy tohoto programu; „Následný FLES“, kdy se děti učí stejný jazyk dva či více roků za sebou, přičemž jde většinou o samostatný předmět; „Obsahově obohacený FLES“, jenž k lepšímu osvojení cizího jazyka využívá obsahovou stránku (v občanské výchově, přírodovědných předmětech či v literatuře); „částečné vnoření“, kdy se denně určité množství látky vyučuje v cílovém jazyce; „úplné vnoření“, kdy se veškerá látka vyučuje v cílovém jazyce; „dvojité či bilingvní vnoření“, kdy žáci rozvíjejí dovednosti v prvním jazyce (L1) a v druhém jazyce (L2) současně; a konečně FLEX (Foreign Language Experience – Zkušenost s cizími jazyky), v němž se žáci během školního roku setkávají s různými cizími jazyky (Kaiser, 1996). Teoretická východiska, a hlavně cíle jednotlivých programů jsou odlišné a je nutno je v každém kurikulárním plánu náležitě zvážit.

Skutečnost, že programy FLES jsou založeny na obecně rozšířeném, ale prokazatelně nepravdivém mýtu, že děti se učí jazykům „lépe“ než dospělí, dokazuje, že většina pedagogických činitelů je při jejich zavádění vedena spíše jen zbožným přáním. Jediná oblast, ve které děti předčí dospělé studenty, je osvojení si autentické výslovnosti, což je jistě důležitý aspekt osvojení si cizího jazyka (SLA), ale rozhodně nikoli aspekt rozhodující pro schopnost v tomto jazyce komunikovat. Výzkumy ukazují, že dospívající a dospělí studenti jazyků mají oproti dětem kognitivní výhody: rozvinutější dovednosti v mateřském jazyce: lepší schopnost porovnávat struktury a pojmy mateřského a cílového jazyka; větší zběhlost v zevšeobecňování a rozpoznávání odchylek; lepší kognitivní schopnost přemýšlet o svém učení.

Započetí cizojazyčné výuky na počátku školní docházky však opravdu má některé výhody. Jak uvádí Kaiser (1996), žáci základní školy nejsou ideálními studenty cizích jazyků po stránce kognitivní a psychologické, ale mají možná proti starším studentům výhody v emoční rovině. Tyto výhody mohou pramenit z nižšího „afektivního filtru“, čili nižšího stupně emočních zábran vůči učení se, jako jsou například úzkost, rozpačitost či strach z nezdaru (Krashen, 1981). Navíc se zdá, že FLES snad má pozitivní dopad na kognitivní dovednosti dětí, jejich vyhodnocovací schopnosti, neverbální řešení problémů, obrazotvornost, sebehodnocení, vnímání plurikulturalismu, toleranci rozdílností a na průběh pozdějšího studia cizích jazyků (Kaiser, 1996). Zatímco i samotný poslední bod tohoto výčtu zdánlivě ospravedlňuje zavádění programů FLES, politické, společenské a výchovně-vzdělávací faktory podmiňující jejich úspěšnost tento princip zpochybňují.

Jaké jsou tedy ony faktory, potřebné k úspěšnému FLES? Základní podmínkou úspěchu je samozřejmě dobře připravená implementační strategie, vypracovaná kvalifikovanými pedagogickými odborníky z oblasti výzkumu i praxe, z níž vzejde teoreticky fundovaný program založený na nejnovějších výzkumech a přiměřený společensko-vzdělávacímu kontextu; tato strategie nesmí pouze odrážet vnitřní nebo vnější sociopolitické tlaky či stranit některé politické skupině. Jinými slovy

- program musí být v souladu s teorií a výzkumy
- musí zapadat do existujícího společensko-vzdělávacího kontextu
- tyto podmínky by neměly být ovlivněny politickými principy.

Zkušenosti

Spojené státy znají mnoho příkladů neúspěšných programů FLES. Velkou měrou se na tom zřejmě podílí specifická struktura amerického vzdělávacího systému, v němž má federální vláda tradičně velmi omezenou roli při

zavádění vzdělávací politiky (což ale neznamená, že se nepodílí na její přípravě).

Základní i střední školy v USA jsou téměř výhradně financovány z prostředků jednotlivých států či z obecních prostředků; pouze 8 % jde z fondů federálního rozpočtu (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Teoreticky se o kurikulu a metodologii rozhoduje na úrovni státu nebo obce, jelikož federální vládě zákon zasahování do těchto rozhodnutí zakazuje. Avšak její vliv na vzdělávací politiku státu a obcí je naprosto nepřiměřený v poměru k objemu financí, které poskytuje; jelikož státní a obecní financování musí být schváleno občany okresů ve volbách a jelikož většina voličů není ochotna zvýšit své daňové zatížení ve prospěch školství, oněch 8 % z federálního rozpočtu bývá často jediným zaručeným zdrojem financí, na který se školský systém může spolehnout. Školy tudíž většinou dělají, co od nich federální ministerstvo školství žádá. Ministerstvo školství tvrdí, že

každý federální školský zákon je podmíněn rozhodnutím jednotlivého státu nebo jiného žadatele o grant přijmout finanční prostředky v rámci federálního programu. „Požadavky“ federálního školského programu nejsou nepodložená nařízení, protože podmínky uvedené ve federálním zákoně platí pouze tehdy, jestliže se nějaký stát či jiný uchazeč o grant dobrovolně rozhodne pro přijetí federálních peněz. Pokud se kterýkoli ze států nechce cítit vázán požadavky některého federálního programu, může se prostě rozhodnout nepřijmout finanční prostředky s tímto programem spojené. Většina států tyto prostředky přijímá a užívá, avšak několik států se jich již z různých důvodů zřeklo (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Není sporu o tom, že zájem federální vlády na růstu vlivu v zahraničí v 50. a 60. letech 20. století a následná soustředěná pozornost ministerstva školství na výuku cizích jazyků stály v pozadí skutečného boomu programů FLES ve státních i soukromých školách. Tyto programy bývaly bohužel často motivovány politicky, byly překotně navrženy a uvedeny do praxe, postrádaly návaznost mezi primárním a sekundárním vzdělávacím stupněm, používaly nevhodnou metodologii, slibovaly nereálné výsledky a konečně trpěly závažným nedostatkem kvalifikovaných učitelů (Lipton, 1998). Mezi dalšími problémy uvádějí Curtain a Dahlberg (2000) „nízkou frekvenci jazykových hodin v rozvrhu nebo jejich nedostatečnou délku ... odlišný pohled na cizí jazyky než na jiné všeobecně vzdělávací předměty ... omezení nabídky na běžně vyučované jazyky bez ohledu na další důležité světové jazyky ... přehlížení potřeb studentů vstupujících do programu ve vyšších třídách ...

plánování a časování cizojazyčného programu odděleně od obecného kurikula ... [a] rozvrh a pracovní zátěž vedoucí k „vyhoření“ učitele (s. 2-6). Heining-Boyntonová (1990) ve své kritice tehdejších programů FLES připojuje nedostatek podpory ze strany rodičů a nedostatečné hodnocení, známkování a domácí úkoly.

Nakonec ona politická motivace těchto programů (tj. tlak ze strany ministerstva školství vytvářet programy bez odpovídající přípravy, prostředků, výzkumu a finančního zajištění) nestačila k tomu, aby je udržela při životě. Politickým důsledkem selhání těchto programů FLES bylo omezení financování; společenským důsledkem bylo všeobecné rozčarování. V polovině 70. let už ve školách zůstalo jen málo programů FLES.

Pozitivním důsledkem oněch experimentů bylo množství dobře sestavených empirických studií o podmínkách nezbytných pro úspěšnost programů. Jak upozorňuje Liptonová (1998), „předchozí práce na tomto poli nepochybně zasazují výuku cizích jazyků na základní škole do historického kontextu“ (s.13). Tento důraz na výzkum a vyhodnocení trvá i za současného oživení programů FLES v USA. Výzkum prováděný během uplynulých čtyř desetiletí lze shrnout jednoduše takto:

- úspěšné programy mají specifické, dobře rozpoznatelné charakteristické rysy
- nejdůležitějším předpokladem úspěšného programu jsou kvalifikovaní učitelé
- kvalifikovaní učitelé mají specifický soubor znalostí a dovedností.

Charakteristika úspěšných programů FLES

Přehled čtyř studií o podmínkách nezbytných pro úspěšnost programů FLES ukazuje pozoruhodně podobné výsledky, i když jejich výzkumné metodologie i výzkumné cíle se velmi liší: Na základě mnohaleté učitelské i výzkumné praxe předpovídá Liptonová (1991) – přehnaně optimisticky – budoucí stav FLES v roce 2000, a nastiňuje ideální podmínky pro úspěšné programy; Girard (1996) přezkoumává a aktualizuje empirické výsledky vlastní studie z r. 1974, objednané francouzským ministerstvem školství, a své studie z r. 1992 o výzkumu prováděném v Německu, Rakousku, Dánsku, Švédsku, Itálii, Francii a ve Spojeném království; Kaiser (1996) předkládá důkladný přehled severoamerických výzkumů účinnosti programů FLES; Gilzow (2002) shrnuje výsledky výzkumu prováděného Ministerstvem školství USA koncem 90. let zaměřeného na stanovení obecných charakteristik úspěšných programů FLES v 7 školách ve státech Florida, Massachusetts, Severní Karolína, Connecticut, Maryland, Ohio a Oregon. Porovnání závěrů a doporučení, plynoucích z těchto zpráv Americkému výboru pro výuku

cizích jazyků, přináší seznam charakteristik efektivních programů pro výuku cizích jazyků na základní škole, jež ukazuje následující zobecnění:

Charakteristika 1: „Cíle a intenzita programu: programové cíle odpovídají času skutečně věnovanému výuce“ (ACTFL). Girard (1996) hovoří o „přiměřeném rozvrhování“, zatímco Kaiser (1996) volá po stanovení vhodných a reálných cílů a sestavení programu, který bude těmto cílům vyhovovat.

Charakteristika 2: „Dlouhé období: Programy výuky cizích jazyků na základních školách tvoří základy dlouhého propracovaného postupu uskutečňování pečlivě vypracovaných kurikul, který končí až v posledním ročníku střední školy“ (ACTFL). Girard (1996) nazývá tento rys „návazností“ (continuity).

Charakteristika 3: „Propracovanost: propracovanost rozšířeného postupu, jak vertikálně tak i horizontálně, napříč oběma stupni základní i v průběhu střední školy. Tato propracovanost je výsledkem konsensu, pečlivého plánování a monitorování mezi učiteli jazyků, výchovnými poradci a rodiči na všech úrovních...“ (ACTFL). Důležitost tohoto faktoru zdůrazňují všechny čtyři studie (Gilzow, 2002; Girard, 1996; Kaiser, 1996; Lipton, 1991).

Charakteristika 4: „Kurikulum: pro systematické rozvíjení kurikula jsou k dispozici lidské, finanční i časové zdroje. Pravidelné přezkoumávání kurikula umožňuje hodnocení“ (ACTFL). Žádná ze čtyř studií kurikulum přímo nezmiňuje, ale materiály, metodami a hodnocením se každá z nich zabývá (viz dále). Autoři to možná ve světle svých dalších doporučení považují za samozřejmé.

Charakteristika 5: „Výuka: výuka odpovídá stupni pokročilosti žáků, programovým výsledkům a současné odborné praxi“ (ACTFL). Gilzow (2002) i Kaiser (1996) pojednávají o efektivních učebních metodách se zaměřením na obsah učiva (content-based instruction); Gilzow (2002) a Liptonová (1991) také volají po patřičném využití technologie.

Charakteristika 6: „Materiály: materiály odpovídají stupni pokročilosti žáků, jsou bohaté na reálie a současný jazyk a navazují na kurikulum“ (ACTFL). Girard (1996) a Liptonová (1991) opakují totéž doporučení; je obsaženo i v Kaiserově (1996) výzvě k výuce zaměřené na obsah.

Charakteristika 7: „Hodnocení: používány jsou postupy jak hodnocení žákovských pokroků, tak úspěšnosti programů“ (ACTFL). Všechny čtyři studie vyjadřují stejný závěr, Girard (1996) ještě zdůrazňuje „jednotné hodnocení a kontrolu kvality“.

Charakteristika 8: „Učitelé: v programech vyučují kvalifikovaní učitelé, kteří absolvovali metodickou přípravu pro výuku cizích jazyků na základní škole, zahrnující též psychologii školáka a povahu kurikula základní školy. Učitelé by měli být vysoce kvalifikovaní jak jazykově, tak i v oblasti reálií.

Podle znalostní stupnice ACTFL/ETS by měl být ústní projev učitele v cizím jazyce „pokročilý“ (ACTFL). I tuto charakteristiku všichni čtyři autoři zdůrazňují. Girard (1996), Kaiser (1996) (získávání a stabilizace kvalifikovaných učitelských kádřů) a Liptonová (1991) zdůrazňují vysoce kvalifikované učitele jako jeden ze základních předpokladů úspěšnosti programů. Tento faktor je přítomen i u Gilzowa (2002), především pak v jeho a Rhodesově článku z r. 2000.

Charakteristika 9: „Profesní rozvoj: pokračující program profesního rozvoje by měl umožnit učitelům zvyšovat svou odbornost po stránce jazykové, znalosti reálií i metodické“ (ACTFL). Totéž vyzdvihují i Girard (1996), Gilzow (2002) a Liptonová (1991).

Charakteristika 10: „Podpora a součinnost školy a veřejnosti: učitelé cizích jazyků spolupracují se školskou veřejností na začlenění cizojazyčného kurikula do vzdělávacího programu školy“ (ACTFL). I Kaiser (1996) doporučuje rozvíjet spolupráci rodičů a veřejnosti.

Charakteristika 11: „Kultura: je ujasněn vztah mezi jazykem a kulturou, výuka cizích jazyků je doplněna kulturním kontextem. Jasnými cíli programu jsou porozumění kultuře a informovanost o ní“ (ACTFL). Zajímavé je, že pouze nejstarší z příspěvků (Lipton, 1991) volá po začlenění reálií; u zbývajících tří autorů však lze toto z textů vyrozumět.

K doplnění charakteristiky 11 Liptonová (1991) předpovídá, že pro úspěšnost programů FLES bude rozhodující proměna kvalifikačních postupů, intenzivní a trvalý výzkum programů FLES, pěstování spolupráce mezi učiteli základních, středních a vysokých škol a rozvoj systémů jejich podpory a vytváření pracovních skupin. Gilzow se navíc zabývá součinností s Národním standardem výuky cizích jazyků a financováním.

Charakteristika úspěšných učitelů FLES

Význam vysoce kvalifikovaných učitelů je trvalým námětem výzkumu programů FLES. Peyton (1997) podává přehled literatury zabývající se charakteristikou dobrého učitele cizích jazyků a dochází k závěru, že úspěšný učitel musí mít:

- vysoký stupeň jazykové způsobilosti ve všech čtyřech dovednostech cílového jazyka – mluvení, poslech, čtení a psaní
- schopnost používat jazyk v kontextu reálných situací jak pro sociální, tak pro odbornou komunikaci
- schopnost ústního i písemného porozumění současným cizojazyčným médiím a úspěšné interakce s rodilými mluvčími v USA i v zahraničí (Phillips, 1991).

- dobrý přehled v humanitních vědách a obsahové stránce učiva
- znalosti o společenských, politických, historických a ekonomických skutečnostech v oblastech, kde se vyučovaným jazykem mluví
- pedagogické znalosti a dovednosti včetně znalosti vývoje lidského jedince, teorie učení se a teorie osvojování si cizího jazyka; a dále soubor metod rozvíjejících dovednosti a pochopení odlišné kultury u všech žáků (Gutermann, 1992)
- znalost různých technologií a schopnost použít je ve výuce (s. 3-4)

Následuje stručný přehled některých výzkumů, vztahujících se k diskutované problematice a k teorii učení se.

Konstruktivismus a komunikativní teorie

Konstruktivismus a komunikativní teorie zdůrazňují, že učení se je aktivní proces. To znamená, že děti musí být při výuce cizího jazyka aktivní a musí být pečlivě vedeny. To platí i tehdy, učí-li se děti druhému jazyku. Důležité je, že naše poznámky se vztahují předně k americké literatuře o výuce druhého jazyka, která je mnohem snazší než výuka cizího jazyka. U druhého jazyka jsou děti novým jazykem přímo obklopeny. V USA je tímto jazykem angličtina. Mluví se jí ve většině domácností, ve školách, na veřejnosti i ve sdělovacích prostředcích a v tištěné podobě se objevuje v novinách, knihách a časopisech. Děti v USA, jejichž mateřským jazykem je španělština, jsou takto vlastně ponořeny v anglicky komunikujícím prostředí a učí se tedy jaksi přímo a bezděčně. Toto obklopení novým jazykem je v jeho učení velkou výhodou.

Naproti tomu učit se cizí jazyk v České republice je pro děti mnohem náročnější úkol a to zvláště u dětí, které dosud nemají rozvinuty kognitivní dovednosti, a nemají ani dostatečné znalosti čtení a psaní v mateřském jazyce.

Důležitým faktorem je tedy věk, kdy se české děti začínají učit anglicky. K tomuto bodu se brzy vrátíme, nejprve však ještě k vyučovací praxi.

Praktické aspekty

Tam, kde je výuka založena na konstruktivisticko-komunikativní teorii, učitelé zprvu studentům hodně pomáhají, aby pak na ně postupně přesouvali odpovědnost. Z hlediska vyučování je důležité, aby úkoly svou snadností nenudily, ale na druhé straně aby nebyly příliš obtížné, což by v dětech vzbudilo obavu z neúspěchu. Děti se při učení musí cítit bezpečné a jisté; neúspěch negativně ovlivňuje motivaci a může silně narušit sebedůvěru. K zajištění procesu učení a pro podporu jeho vnitřní motivace jsou jednotlivé

úkoly ve výuce opatřeny oporou (*scaffolding*), kterou učitel v hodinách neustále promýšlí a uplatňuje.

Následující zásady takové opory pocházejí z článku Tharpa a Galimora (1995).

(S1) Pracuj na společném řešení problémů: zapoj děti do smysluplné činnosti. Pomoz jim učit se činností. Děti by si měly vyzkoušet aktivity, jejichž součástí je třídění a vytváření slovních kategorií v mateřském i v cizím jazyce.

(S2) Nacházej společné porozumění a pracuj na společném cíli. Ved' s dětmi rozhovory, klad' účelné otázky, ved' je k řešení úkolů ústní i písemnou formou.

(S3) Zachovej si laskavost a vnímavost: požívej citlivý tón hlasu - nešetři ústní chválou. Uznej schopnosti dítěte.

(S4) Neopouštěj zónu nejbližšího vývoje (ZPD): vol aktivity, které jsou pro děti náročné, ale s nápomocí proveditelné. Svými pokyny podněcuj děti k hovoru; úspěšný učitel povzbuzuje děti k správnému řešení a chválí každý krůček na této cestě. Báječný způsob počáteční výuky cizího jazyka je metoda TPR; mělo by se jí využívat na všech úrovních cizojazyčného vyučování.

(S5) Podporuj samoregulaci: ustup do pozadí a nech děti, aby si svou činnost samy řídily. V případě potřeby jim pomoz při plnění úkolu.

Tato opora bývá náročná pro učitele, kteří mají sklon „přeučovat“ a nedokáží dovést děti k samostatné volbě a procvičování. Procvičování se neomezuje pouze na správné odpovědi, ale spíš na částečně správné odpovědi a usilovné zapojení. Důležité je, aby procvičování nebylo zkoušením, ale spíš bezpečným projevem, při němž se děti učí z vlastních pokusů a od spolužáků. Mělo by být naplněné dětským hovorem a aktivitou. Dále k tomuto tématu viz Crawford (2005) a Freppon (2001).

Jak jsme již naznačily, k čínorodému dění ve třídě značně přispívají cílevědomé aktivity a spolupráce s učitelem a spolužáky. Úspěšná třída živě reaguje a její hodiny překypují hovorem, čtením, psaním a kreslením.

Teoretické podklady k typům tříd a k výuce cizích jazyků, které ve svém příspěvku doporučuji, vycházejí také z práce Vygotského (1978). Ten se domnívá, že vědomosti se budují ve společenském prostředí, přičemž klíčovým aspektem je Zóna nejbližšího vývoje (ZPD). *Co dnes dítě umí jen s něčí pomocí, dokáže zítra samostatně.*

Teorie schématu

Pro lepší pochopení procesu učení vzešla z oblasti kognitivní psychologie teorie schématu. Teorie schématu učí, že studenti mají určitá základní pojetí či předchozí znalosti, na jejichž základě budují znalosti nové. Výuka cizích jazyků by pak měla být postavena na tématech a námětech dětem již známých. Toto uznávané a ceněné hledisko (názor) opět předpokládá vysoce aktivní úlohu a porozumění studentů. Ani ti nejmladší studenti rozhodně nejsou „prázdné nádoby“. Dobrý učitel staví na tom, co studenti už vědí, a pomáhá jim ve smysluplném učení.

Konstruktivistickou učební teorii lze aplikovat na literaturu. Studenti zde reagují subjektivně a kriticky; začínají mluvit, číst a psát v cizím jazyce a jejich schémata tak dostávají svůj tvar. Čtení a psaní (v cizím jazyce) lze učit současně s mluvením (za použití TPR) tehdy, jestliže se děje postupně a je-li zachována zóna nejbližšího vývoje (ZPD), aby děti byly úspěšné. Síše se vyučuje než zkouší.

Hodnocení lze provádět neformálně a formativně, a nemělo by vést k pocitu neúspěchu u vyvíjejícího se studenta. Hodnocení by mělo sloužit k usměrňování výuky a pomáhat učiteli stanovit, kdy má zasáhnout, pomoci, či odvést výuku na bezpečnou půdu. Učitel pak postupně zadává náročnější úkoly v souladu se zvyšující se úspěšností studentů.

Čtenářská odezva

Práce Louisy Rosenblattové (1978) prosazuje teorii 'čtenářské odezvy'. Tato teorie zdůrazňuje úlohu čtenáře při konstruování významu. Jak děti postupují ve zvládnutí mateřského i cizího jazyka, dostává se jim povzbuzení vytvářet textové interpretace jak literární, tak i kritické. Dobrý učitel vždy ocení vlastní přínos studentů při konstruování významu. Učitel je klíčovým činitelem při výuce nových dovedností, slovní zásoby a pojmů. Svou prací propojuje osobní reakce dětí s novou látkou.

Metakognitivní učení

Už z Ogdenovy a Richardovy práce (1923) i z pozdějších výzkumů kognitivní vědy víme, že rozhodujícím (kritickým) momentem úspěšné výuky je to, jak si děti samy učební proces uvědomují. Když se tedy dítě nad nějakým slovem zarazí, učitel si nepomyslí, že dítě to slovo nezná, ale spíš že si samo uvědomuje, že ho nerozeznává dostatečně rychle, a proto váhá. Taková reakce se považuje za známku pokroku a učitelovo povzbuzení umožní dítěti ono slovo vyslovit.

Výše uvedené učební teorie podporují myšlenku, že i když produkty učení (výstupy) jsou důležité, rozhodující je samotný proces učení a konstruování významu. Konstruování významu je aktivita dětí a je možné je naučit provádět ji mnohem efektivněji. Docházejí k metakognitivnímu uvědomění prostřednictvím kognitivního učení, jak je výše zmíněno v pojednání o společenské povaze učebního procesu (Vygotsky, 1978).

Učební metody

Některé metody/postupy posilující učení se jazykům:

- Učitelé a spolužáci modelují a převádějí učební procesy s využitím metod myšlení nahlas a grafického znázorňování, viz Crawford (1995).
- Učení psaním. Psát, hovořit o námětech k psaní a zachytit jazyk tiskem – to vše hluboce ovlivňuje náš způsob myšlení. Luriův výzkum (1976) ukazuje, že lidé, kteří neuměli číst a psát, nebyli také schopni uvažovat nad rámcem konkrétní zkušenosti, abstraktní úvahy.

Odborníci na osvojování cizích jazyků se rozcházejí v názoru, kdy je ten „správný věk“ na započetí výuky cizích jazyků. Výzkumné zprávy zabývající se výukou druhého jazyka v USA naznačují, že pokud se s učením druhého jazyka nezačne velice brzy, tedy např. do 3 - 4 let věku, mělo by se pak začít teprve tehdy, až dítě dostatečně ovládá svou mateřštinu. Podle našeho názoru se lze na základě našich současných znalostí domnívat, že totéž platí i o učení se cizím jazykům.

V mateřské škole a v první a druhé třídě základní školy vyžívají děti v mateřštině a rozvíjejí se u nich důležité kognitivní dovednosti. Je velice důležité, aby se jim v této době, kdy se začínají učit jazyk ústně i písemně, dostalo patřičné podpory. Je potom pravděpodobnější, že z nich vyrostou jedinci, kteří budou číst, psát a budou schopni zachycovat vlastní myšlenky, debatovat o nich a posunout i své myšlení kupředu.

Výchova k sociální odpovědnosti

Sociálně odpovědní studenti nejsou pasivní. V dobře spolupracujících třídách, kde učení je aktivním smysluplným procesem, se ze studentů stávají „lepší“ občané. Sociální zodpovědnost přichází ruku v ruce s kognitivními dovednostmi a postoji, jako je empatie a samopůsobení.

Jak napsal John Dewey: „Cvičíme-li děti v plnění rozkazů (pokynů), aby něco dělaly, protože jim to bylo nakázáno a nedáme-li jim důvěru, aby samy

přemýšlely, budujeme tím téměř nezdolatelnou překážku na cestě k překonání současných nedostatků...“ (Dewey, 1915, s. 304).

V následujících poznámkách se opíráme o výzkum výuky druhého jazyka (L2) uskutečněný v USA. Jak už jsme uvedly, domníváme se, že stejná vodítka platí i pro výuku cizího jazyka.

- Děti musí nejprve dobře rozumět ústnímu projevu v druhém jazyce, umět jím trochu mluvit a být si jisté při čtení a psaní v mateřštině. Teprve pak lze po nich chtít, aby se učily číst a psát v druhém jazyce.
- Collierovy výzkumy ukazují, že nejrychlejšího pokroku ve studiu druhého jazyka dosáhly děti ve věku 9 až 11 let.
- V nižších třídách (MŠ, 1., 2. a částečně 3. třídě) musí kompetentní učitelé začít s žáky správně číst a psát v mateřštině.
- Když umí děti číst a psát v mateřském jazyce, mohou se pomocí srozumitelných metod začít učit číst ve druhém jazyce. Výtečně se pro začátek hodí Key Vocabulary Approach a později Language Experience Approach (LEA) (Stauffer, 1975, Crawford, Allen, a Hall, 1995).

Při adaptování těchto metod/postupů ve výuce angličtiny jako cizího jazyka by učitelé měli postupovat opatrně. Jestliže je však s takovou výukou započato až po vybudování pevných základů pomocí TPR, domníváme se, že postupné využívání klíčové slovní zásoby (key vocabulary), metody jazykového prožitku (LEA), cloze testů a dalších uvedených technik dobře poslouží i českým dětem při úspěšném studiu angličtiny. Úspěch plodí úspěch!

Doufáme, že některé výše uvedené principy, které dobře fungují při výuce angličtiny jako druhého jazyka v USA, mohou podnítit úvahy a diskusi o jejich využití při výuce cizích jazyků.

Závěr

Není sporu o tom, že programy FLES mohou patřit mezi nejinnovativnější a pedagogicky nejproduktivnější iniciativy v naší základní škole. Stejně tak je však zřejmé, že k jejich úspěšnosti je zapotřebí pečlivého plánování a přípravy. Obnovení těchto programů v USA po r. 1990 a jejich pokračování a nárůst v Evropě – včetně současně probíhající složky výzkumné a evaluační – jsou značným příslibem pro budoucí jazykové vzdělávání. Ti, kdo budou zvažovat zavádění programů FLES, by se měli poučit z dřívějších i současných výzkumů, které svědčí o kritické potřebě zdravé politiky, řádné praxe

a dostatečného množství dobře připravených učitelů, odborně vzdělaných jak ve výuce cizích jazyků, tak v obecné pedagogice. Varovným hlasům se vyplatí naslouchat, chceme-li se dobrat úspěchu.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING/ACQUISITION AT AN EARLY AGE

Gabriela Lojová

***Abstract:** In this paper I discuss some of the general psychological and pedagogical aspects that have to be taken into consideration when deciding about the age of starting foreign language learning. The paper provides an overview of the variables determining the effectiveness of language learning such as inner predispositions, and the educational and environmental conditions in Slovakia. I will also point to some crucial constraints such as the qualifications of teachers, the advantages and possible risks of introducing early language learning to mainstream schools.*

One of the most frequently asked questions all over the world is: “What is the right age to start learning a foreign language? However, there is no clear answer to the question and the more we study or research this question the more difficult it becomes to find a clear recommendation. The main reason is that foreign language learning is a very complex process determined by a number of variables that must be taken into consideration in any specific situation. Needless to say, in evolutionary terms language is the youngest, the most complex and therefore the most vulnerable mental function.

Current research does not provide evidence to support any generally acceptable opinion. Another problem is that most research has been conducted in the field of second language acquisition (e.g. in Canada, USA, Scandinavian countries, etc.). However, research in the field of foreign language learning is still in its infancy. The commonly held opinion is “the younger the better”. But nowadays there is no sound research evidence supporting this opinion. What is even more, there are numerous research findings in favour of starting foreign language learning at an older age.

It is obvious that the answer to the question depends primarily upon the very basic question: “What is language?” The supporters of Chomsky’s theory of universal grammar have been arguing with the supporters of Piaget’s cognitive theory for almost five decades. The clear answer to this fundamental question (What is language?) would undoubtedly help us progress in our endeavour to decide what is the right age for children to start learning a foreign language.

Understandably in this situation the opinions of experts all over the world differ considerably and all of them support their views with different theories, research findings and observations. Generally they endorse three different opinions:

1. *“the sooner the better”*

Experts endorsing this opinion support the Critical Period Hypothesis. They believe in brain plasticity at an early age which enables rapid subconscious learning and developing innate brain capacity. They also suggest that children’s potential is wasted if it is not being developed sufficiently at an early age. Therefore this potential, and cognitive capacity in particular, must be stimulated by an enriched environment, so why not also by a foreign language.

2. *“later is enough”*

Experts holding this position do not believe in the Critical Period Hypothesis. Generally they fight against overloading children at an early age, which is predominantly the age of play. Children’s potential should be developed and stimulated in a natural way and in a natural environment. However, a foreign language is not considered to be a natural environment, unlike the mother tongue or a second language. Furthermore, they warn that cognitive (language) development should not be overestimated to the detriment of other aspects and functions, particularly emotional and personal. They also claim that children can learn a foreign language faster, better and more effectively once the learning mechanisms have been developed that correspond to the conditions of instructed classroom language learning. So, “Why bother children so early with foreign language learning?”

3. *“it depends”*

This is a kind of integrated position. Many experts claim that each age has both advantages and disadvantages that have to be taken into consideration when deciding about a specific child. In addition, they do not consider age to be the only powerful or decisive variable. They emphasise the importance of other variables, namely inner predispositions, the social environment, and educational conditions.

In this paper this third position will be discussed in detail as it seems to be the most plausible.

Whatever the state-of-the-art research is, educators have to think about the situation here and now. Should Slovakian children start to learn a foreign language at pre-school age, or should a foreign language be introduced at the beginning of primary school, or later? Let’s begin with the variables that should be taken into consideration to make the best decision for the children:

1. Inner predispositions

Inner predispositions are considered to be the most important if we want to promote learner-centred foreign language education. According to this approach and in accordance with fundamental humanistic and constructivist positions, “Everything that is achieved in the classroom eventually depends upon what is going on in the learners’ minds” (Lojová, 2005:31). Whatever decision we take we have to keep this principle in mind.

Considering the biological predisposition, the critical period question is crucial: Is there a biologically determined optimal, sensitive age when language functions can develop easily and more effectively? Is it related to brain plasticity, lateralization or some other aspects? The questions have been in circulation for almost five decades, since Penfield and Roberts posed them and many researchers, mainly Lenneberg, have been striving to find the answer. In addition there are numerous additional questions such as:

- If there is a critical period, is it just for a mother tongue or for second language acquisition or also for foreign language learning?
- Up to what age does it apply?
- Is there the same critical period for all language aspects and functions (e.g. the phonological system, grammar, vocabulary)?

Answers to these questions would substantially impact on our decisions and methodological procedures.

Regarding the psychological predisposition, we have to consider both cognitive and affective components. As for cognitive functions, developmental psychology claims that under normal conditions at the age of six, cognitive capacity, structures, functions and mechanisms are ready to start creating the inner representation of another linguistic system. Research findings support this widely held opinion (Farkašová, 1998). However, cognitive domains cannot be overestimated to the detriment of other aspects of overall development, particularly at an early age. Therefore numerous affective components have to be considered. Nowadays it is clear that the impact of affective components on the effectiveness of learning and final achievements is more powerful than was previously considered. As affective variables are to a great extent determined by external conditions, assessing affective readiness for foreign language learning cannot occur without the analysis of the social, linguistic and educational environment.

2. Social and linguistic environment

Among many questions related to this issue, the most important seems to be the distinction between second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning (FLL) processes. There is also a long-running discussion among experts, particularly cognitive psychologists, about the differences (Krashen, 1974, Lojová, 2005). Whatever the opinions are, from our perspective it is crucial how children perceive a language. If they live in a target language environment, they perceive it as a natural means of communication where the social environment naturally stimulates and corrects their second language performance and provides them with immense language input. If they do not live in a target language environment they perceive it just as a subject at school. These fundamentally different perceptions stimulate different learning mechanisms and affective variables, particularly motivational, which are of crucial importance.

Therefore when thinking about the right age to start foreign language learning we have to exercise great caution. We cannot uncritically take on the theories applied in SLA or draw on the experiences and teaching materials from countries where children are educated in natural bilingual or even trilingual environments (e.g. in USA, Canada, Switzerland, Scandinavian countries, etc.). We have to evaluate them critically, learn from them, adopt and adapt them to our contemporary conditions. As it is obvious that SLA is much more effective at an early age, we must try to make FLL as natural as possible (e.g. bring the everyday life of pupils to the foreign language classroom, through CLIL, implementing language learning “through subjects”, etc.). In addition we should provide children with enriched language environments, i.e. they should be naturally exposed to much more foreign language input via radio and TV programmes, magazines, cultural events, field trips, etc., as is done in Scandinavian countries.

3. Educational conditions

The final point to consider here are the numerous educational conditions and related problems.

The crucial issue here seems to be the problem of qualified teachers as a teacher is undoubtedly the most important component of successful language education at an early age. Before the educational authorities decide about introducing language learning to elementary education they need to resolve the problem of teacher qualification. There are again a couple of fundamental questions: Have we got sufficient numbers of qualified teachers for (very) young learners and specialized foreign language teacher training programs? Have we already answered the question about who should teach small children: qualified kindergarten (elementary) teachers with sufficient

target language proficiency and knowledge of foreign language methodology, or qualified foreign language teachers with enriched knowledge of elementary or pre-school methodology? Introducing early language learning without solving these problems would definitely not be to the benefit of the children. We do not want to repeat the contemporary practice evident in many kindergartens where teachers seem to have adopted the commonly held false belief that “anybody can teach small children” or its weaker version that “any language teacher can teach small children”.

Equally important is the problem of “specialized” methodology, which should be based on a learner-centred approach and on a knowledge of developmental psychology to match children’s needs and respect their developmental differences (see: Lojová, 2005, ch. 4.4). A specialized methodology must underlie everything; setting aims and objectives, choice of contents, methods, forms, and teaching materials.

Before introducing early foreign language learning to all schools even more general aspects need to be considered:

- Humanisation of school: Have we achieved the level of humanisation where children can enjoy education and foreign language learning and develop their potential optimally? Beginning schooling is still a very stressful experience for many children. Despite their eagerness and excitement before the first day at school, after a couple of months many children are frustrated, stressed, overloaded and demotivated. This signals that there must be something wrong with educational conditions. Introducing foreign language learning in this situation could be even more frustrating.

- Mainstream schools are attended not only by bright and average pupils but also by weaker ones (the Gaussian distribution). For these children it is often difficult to cope with elementary school requirements, sufficiently develop basic skills such as writing, reading, and counting. Beginning foreign language learning at the same time would be even more overloading and frustrating for them.

- There is an increasing number of pupils with special educational needs (with learning difficulties, social or emotional problems). Teachers nowadays are hardly sufficiently qualified to meet existing needs in elementary education never mind foreign language teaching.

- More and more children with visual, hearing and other impediments are being integrated nowadays. They require special teaching approaches, adapted curricula, syllabi, methodology. Elementary language teachers would need

specialized training to be able to develop children's potential within their limits.

- Due to the above mentioned problems it is often suggested that early foreign language learning should be introduced selectively and children should be given a choice, as it is in alternative schools. However, the problem is how to organize it to prevent labelling? Most psychologists warn that selectivity and labelling at such an early age is very dangerous. It can cause life-long damage to children's self-esteem and negatively influence many aspects of their further development.

- And lastly, there is the problem of ensuring continuity of foreign language learning so as not to waste the energy of teachers or that of pupils and demotivate them.

To conclude this brief overview of relevant aspects I have to ask the most fundamental questions:

Are we ready for all this today?

If we introduce a foreign language to preschool or early primary school education, will it be to the benefit of our children and not be detrimental to other aspects of their healthy overall development? Will it boost the optimal development of children's potential? Or will it mean children struggling hard for something that they could achieve more easily a little later?

To be able to answer the questions we need to think critically, to improve all the different conditions, and in particular to conduct thorough research in cooperation with neighbouring countries where the educational, linguistic and environmental conditions are similar.

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UČENIE SA/OSVOJOVANIE SI CUDZIEHO JAZYKA V RANOM VEKU

Gabriela Lojová

Abstrakt: Článok sa zameriava na niektoré všeobecné psychologické a pedagogické aspekty, ktoré je potrebné zvažovať pri rozhodovaní, kedy by sa deti mali začať učiť cudzí jazyk. Poskytuje stručný prehľad činiteľov, ktoré determinujú efektívnosť učenia sa jazykov, ako sú vnútorné dispozície, vplyv sociálneho a edukačného prostredia u nás. Poukazuje aj na niektoré závažné problémy ako napríklad kvalifikovanosť učiteľov, ako aj na výhody a možné problémy pri zavádzaní skorej výučby cudzích jazykov do základných škôl.

Jedna z najčastejších otázok ktorú si ľudia kladú v súvislosti s cudzím jazykom (CJ), je: V akom veku je najvhodnejšie začať sa učiť cudzí jazyk? Jednoznačná odpoveď na túto otázku však neexistuje. A navyše, čím viac sa zamýšľame, čím viac výskumov robíme, tým ťažšie je nájsť jednoznačné odporúčanie. Je to spôsobené predovšetkým skutočnosťou, že učenie sa CJ je veľmi zložitý proces determinovaný množstvom faktorov, ktoré je potrebné brať do úvahy v každej konkrétnej situácii. Súčasne si musíme uvedomovať aj fakt, že reč je evolučne najmladšou a teda aj najzložitejšou a najzraniteľnejšou psychickou funkciou.

Súčasná veda zatiaľ nemá k dispozícii dostatok dôkazov, ktoré by podložili akékoľvek všeobecne prijateľné odporúčania. Snáď najviac rozšírený je názor „čím skôr, tým lepšie“. Avšak stále nemáme k dispozícii výsledky seriózneho výskumu, ktoré by potvrdili túto hypotézu. Ešte prekvapujúcejšie je, že existuje množstvo výskumov, ktoré poukazujú na výhody učenia sa CJ v neskoršom veku (Marshall, 2000).

Je nutné uvedomiť si, že odpoveď na uvedenú otázku závisí v prvom rade od najzákladnejších otázok: Čo je to jazyk? Ako sa reč vyvíja? Zástancovia Chomského teórie univerzálnej gramatiky už takmer 50 rokov polemizujú so zástancami Piagetovskej teórie kognitívneho vývinu (pozri v: Lojová, 2004). Jednoznačná odpoveď na tieto principiálne otázky by bezpochyby pomohla aj pri hľadaní odpovedí na otázky súvisiace s vekom, učením sa a vyučovaním CJ. Situáciu komplikuje aj skutočnosť, že väčšina výskumov vo svete sa zameriava na osvojovanie si druhého jazyka (napríklad v Kanade, USA, škandinávskych krajinách). Avšak výskum v oblasti učenia sa cudzích jazykov je len v začiatkoch.

Je teda pochopiteľné, že v takejto situácii sa názory odborníkov na celom svete značne odlišujú, že každý z nich podkladá svoj názor inou teóriou, výsledkami iných výskumov, ako aj vlastnými empirickými pozorovaniami. Vo všeobecnosti možno hovoriť o troch odlišných názoroch:

1. čím skôr tým lepšie

Zástancovia tohto názoru sú spravidla presvedčení o existencii kritického obdobia. Podľa ich názoru plasticita mozgu v ranom veku umožňuje rýchle podvedomé učenie sa a rozvíjanie vrodenej mozgovej kapacity. Tvrdia, že ak v ranom veku túto kapacitu nerozvíjame dostatočne, plytváme vrodenným potenciálom dieťaťa. A preto je nutné tento potenciál a predovšetkým kognitívnu kapacitu stimulovať obohateným prostredím, no a prečo nie aj cudzojazyčným prostredím.

2. stačí začať neskôr

Odborníci zastávajúci tento názor popierajú existenciu kritického obdobia pre učenie sa CJ. Vo všeobecnosti bojujú proti preťažovaniu dieťaťa v ranom veku. Zdôrazňujú, že predškolský vek je predovšetkým obdobím hry, ktorá má pre zdravý vývin dieťaťa podstatný význam. Vrodený potenciál je potrebné rozvíjať a stimulovať prirodzeným spôsobom v prirodzenom prostredí každého dieťaťa. Cudzí jazyk, na rozdiel od materinského alebo druhého jazyka, však v žiadnom prípade nemožno považovať za prirodzené prostredie. Navyše títo odborníci varujú pred preceňovaním kognitívneho (rečového) vývinu dieťaťa na úkor ďalších aspektov a funkcií, predovšetkým emocionálnych, osobnostných a sociálnych. Tvrdia ďalej, že deti sa môžu učiť CJ rýchlejšie, lepšie a efektívnejšie v neskoršom veku, keď už majú rozvinuté mechanizmy učenia sa, ktoré viac zodpovedajú podmienkam školského vyučovania.

3. záleží od podmienok

Dnes sa čoraz častejšie stretávame s odborníkmi, ktorí zastávajú rôzne eklektické názory. Sú presvedčení, že každý vek má určité výhody i nevýhody, ktoré je treba dôsledne zvažovať pri každom jednotlivom dieťati spolu s podmienkami jeho individuálneho vývinu. Navyše upozorňujú, že vek samotný nemožno považovať za jediný rozhodujúci či všemocný faktor. Podčiarkujú dôležitosť mnohých ďalších činiteľov, ktoré determinujú učenie sa CJ, ako sú vnútorné dispozície, vzdelávacie podmienky a environmentálne vplyvy. Keďže takýto názor považujeme v súčasnosti za najpriateľnejší, v ďalšej časti tohto článku ho rozoberieme podrobnejšie.

Nech už sa názory odborníkov vo svete akokoľvek odlišujú, my musíme rozmýšľať predovšetkým o situácii „tu a teraz“. Dnes stojí pred nami naliehavá otázka: Mala by byť u nás výučba CJ zaradená už do predškolských zariadení, alebo od prvej triedy základnej školy, alebo stačí až neskôr?

Pozrime sa bližšie na jednotlivé faktory, ktoré je potrebné brať do úvahy, ak má naše rozhodnutie skutočne slúžiť v prospech detí.

1. Vnútorne predpoklady

Vnútorne dispozície je nutné považovať za najdôležitejšie, ak chceme poskytovať cudzojazyčné vyučovanie založené na prístupe zameranom na žiaka. Podľa tohto prístupu, t.j. v zhode so základnými princípmi humanistickej a konštruktivistickej psychológie: „Všetko, čo na vyučovaní dosiahneme, v konečnom dôsledku závisí od toho, čo sa deje v psychike učiaceho sa jedinca“. (Lojová, 2005:31). Nech už sa rozhodujeme akokoľvek, tento princíp musíme mať sústavne na zreteli.

Pokiaľ ide o biologické dispozície, podstatná je otázka existencie kritického obdobia. Existuje biologicky determinované optimálne obdobie, kedy sa rečové funkcie rozvíjajú ľahko a najefektívnejšie? Ak áno, súvisí tento jav s plasticitou a lateralizáciou mozgu alebo s inými aspektmi? Už takmer pred pol storočím položili Penfield a Roberts prvýkrát tieto otázky. Odvtedy sa mnohí vedci, predovšetkým Lenneberg, pokúšajú nájsť odpovede (podrobnejšie pozri v: Štefánik, 2004). A navyše existuje množstvo ďalších otázok, ako napríklad: Ak existuje kritické obdobie, platí len pre materinský jazyk, alebo aj pre osvojovanie si druhého jazyka, alebo dokonca aj pre učenie sa cudzieho jazyka? Aké je vekové ohraničenie tohto obdobia? Existuje rovnaké kritické obdobie pre všetky rečové funkcie a pre všetky aspekty rečového vývinu (napr.: fonologický systém, gramatika, slovná zásoba)? Odpovede na všetky tieto a mnohé ďalšie otázky by bezpochyby výrazne ovplyvnili aj naše rozhodnutie, ako aj metodické postupy pri vyučovaní CJ.

Pri analyzovaní psychických dispozícií, je potrebné brať do úvahy tak kognitívne ako aj afektívne predpoklady. Pokiaľ ide o kognitívne aspekty, vývinoví psychológovia sa viac-menej zhodujú v názore, že za normálnych podmienok sú v šiestich rokoch kognitívne štruktúry, kapacita, funkcie a mechanizmy zrelé na vytváranie vnútornej reprezentácie ďalšieho lingvistickeho systému. Tento bežne rozšírený názor potvrdzujú aj výsledky výskumu (podrobnejšie pozri v: Farkašová, 1998). Kognitívnu zrelosť však nemožno preceňovať na úkor ďalších aspektov celkového vývinu, a to predovšetkým v ranom veku. Preto je potrebné brať do úvahy aj mnohé afektívne činitele. Väčšina odborníkov sa dnes už zhoduje v názore, že vplyv afektívnych činiteľov na efektívnosť učenia sa je oveľa väčší, ako sa v minulosti predpokladalo. Keďže afektívne premenné sú v podstatnej miere determinované aj externými podmienkami, nie je možné posudzovať osobnostnú, emocionálnu a sociálnu pripravenosť na učenie sa CJ bez analyzovania sociálneho, lingvistického a edukačného prostredia.

2. Sociálne a lingvistické podmienky

Spomedzi množstva aspektov súvisiacich s našou problematikou vystupuje do popredia potreba uvedomovať si podstatné rozdiely medzi osvojovaním si druhého jazyka a učením sa cudzieho jazyka. Aj v týchto otázkach sa stretávame s nekonečnými polemikami medzi odborníkmi, predovšetkým medzi kognitívnymi psychológmi (podrobnejšie pozri v: Krashen, 1974, Lojova, 2005). Nech už sú názory odborníkov akékoľvek, z nášho hľadiska je podstatné, ako dieťa cudzí jazyk vníma. Ak dieťa žije v prostredí cieľového jazyka, vníma tento jazyk ako prirodzený prostriedok komunikácie, kedy sociálne prostredie prirodzene stimuluje a koriguje jeho cudzojazyčnú performanciu a poskytuje mu rozsiahly cudzojazyčný input. Ak však nežije v takomto prostredí, vníma jazyk len ako vyučovací predmet v škole. Toto principiálne odlišné vnímanie stimuluje odlišné mechanizmy učenia sa a odlišné afektívne premenné, predovšetkým motivačné, ktoré možno považovať za najdôležitejšie.

A preto keď sa zamýšľame nad otázkami veku a učenia sa CJ u nás, musíme byť opatrní. Nemôžeme nekriticky prijímať teórie aplikované pri osvojovaní si druhého jazyka, automaticky preberať skúsenosti a vyučovacie materiály z krajín, kde deti vyrastajú v prirodzenom bilingválnom či dokonca trilingválnom prostredí (napríklad v USA, Kanade, Švajčiarsku). Je potrebné kriticky ich prehodnocovať, poučiť sa z nich a adaptovať ich na naše súčasné podmienky. Keďže je zrejme, že prirodzené osvojovanie je v ranom veku najefektívnejšie, malo by sa vyučovanie CJ v tomto veku čo najviac približovať prirodzeným podmienkam (napríklad: prinášať do triedy každodenný život detí, prostredníctvom CLIL, implementovať cudzojazyčnú výučbu do iných predmetov a podobne). Okrem toho by bolo potrebné poskytovať deťom obohatené jazykové prostredie, ako je to napríklad v škan-dinávskych krajinách. Čiže mali by vo svojom prirodzenom prostredí čo najviac prichádzať do styku s daným CJ prostredníctvom rádia, televízie, časopisov, kultúrnych podujatí, výletov a podobne.

3. Edukačné podmienky

Nemenej dôležité sú aj edukačné podmienky a s tým súvisiace problémy. Za najpodstatnejšiu možno považovať otázku kvalifikovanosti učiteľov, keďže učiteľ je bezpochyby najdôležitejším činiteľom úspešného jazykového vyučovania v ranom veku.

Skôr, ako príslušné orgány rozhodnú o zavedení cudzojazyčnej výučby do elementárneho vzdelávania, je nutné vyriešiť otázku adekvátnej odbornej prípravy učiteľov. Aj tu vystupujú do popredia niektoré základné otázky: Máme dostatok kvalifikovaných učiteľov pre tento vek? Existujú vôbec vzdelávacie programy prípravy učiteľov CJ pre predškolskú či elementárnu

výučbu? Vyriešili sme už otázku, kto by mal vlastne učiť tieto deti: kvalifikovaní učitelia materskej (elementárnej) školy, ktorí ovládajú daný CJ a metodiku vyučovania CJ na dostatočnej úrovni? Alebo kvalifikovaní učitelia CJ so špecifickou prípravou zameranou na metodiku vyučovania v predškolskom a elementárnom veku? Zavedenie skorej výučby bez toho, aby sme vyriešili tieto otázky by určite nebolo v prospech detí. Určite nechceme naďalej pokračovať v praxi, s ktorou sa v súčasnosti stretávame v mnohých materských školách, kde, ako sa zdá, si osvojili bežne rozšírený názor, že malé deti môže učiť hocikto, prípadne miernejšiu verziu, že každý učiteľ CJ môže učiť aj v materskej škole.

Rovnako dôležitý je aj ďalší principiálny problém: U nás zatiaľ nemáme dostatočne rozpracovanú metodiku vyučovania CJ v predškolskom (mladšom školskom) veku. Táto by mala byť bezpodmienečne založená na prístupe zameranom na žiaka a na dôkladnom poznaní vývinových osobitostí v predškolskom veku tak, aby mohla spĺňať potreby dieťaťa a zabezpečovať ich optimálny vývin. Z týchto poznatkov sa nutne musí odvíjať všetko: stanovovanie cieľov, výber obsahu, metód, foriem a učebných materiálov (podrobne pozri v: Lojová, 2005, kap. 4.4).

Skôr, ako rozhodneme o zavedení cudzojazyčnej výučby do elementárneho vzdelávania, je nutné zvážiť aj niektoré všeobecnejšie aspekty, ako napríklad:

- Humanizácia vzdelávania: Dosiahli sme už takú úroveň humanizácie našej školy, aby deti chodili do školy s radosťou, rady sa učili a kde by sme optimálne rozvíjali ich potenciál? Žiaľ, zdá sa, že ešte stále je pre mnohé deti začiatok školskej dochádzky veľmi stresujúci. Aj napriek radosti a vzrušeniu, s akým do školy prichádzajú, už zakrátko pociťujú mnohé deti frustráciu, stres, preťažovanie a sú demotivované. Toto nám jednoznačne signalizuje, že v našom elementárnom vzdelávaní niečo nie je v poriadku. Skoré zavedenie CJ do výučby by bolo v takejto situácii pre tieto deti ešte viac stresujúce.

- Základného vzdelávania sa zúčastňujú nielen priemerné a obzvlášť talentované deti, ale aj deti menej nadané, s nižšou úrovňou všeobecných kognitívnych schopností. Tieto deti často s veľkou námahou zvládajú základné požiadavky elementárneho vzdelávania, ako je rozvíjanie základných zručností čítania, písania a počítania. Ak by sa súčasne mali začať učiť aj CJ, znamenalo by to pre ne neprimeranú záťaž a ďalšie zvyšovanie stresu a frustrácie.

- V našich školách pribúda počet žiakov so špeciálnymi vzdelávacími potrebami (poruchami učenia, sociálnymi a emocionálnymi poruchami). Učitelia v súčasnosti však nie sú dostatočne kvalifikovaní na to, aby dokázali

s týmito žiakmi efektívne pracovať a vychádzať v ústrety ich individuálnym potrebám, čo je pri výučbe CJ ešte náročnejšie.

- Navyše v našich školách sa stále viac uplatňuje integrovanie detí s rôznymi poruchami (zrakovými, sluchovými a podobne). Vyžadujú si špeciálny vyučovací prístup, adaptáciu učebných plánov, metód, materiálov atď. Učitelia CJ by taktiež potrebovali špeciálnu prípravu, aby toto všetko dokázali zabezpečiť a rozvíjať potenciál týchto detí v rámci ich možností.

- V dôsledku týchto problémov sa často stretávame s názorom, aby sa CJ vyučoval selektívne, podobne, ako je to v alternatívnych či v tzv. „výberových“ školách. Problémom však je, ako to uskutočňovať tak, aby sme sa vyhli „nálepkovaniu“ (labelling). Psychológovia varujú, že takéto nálepkovanie v ranom veku je veľmi nebezpečné. Môže spôsobiť dlhodobý negatívny dopad na sebavedomie dieťaťa, jeho obraz o sebe, vzťah k CJ a na mnohé iné aspekty ďalšieho vývinu.

- V neposlednej rade treba spomenúť problém zabezpečenia kontinuity cudzojazyčného vzdelávania tak, aby sa zbytočne neplytvalo potenciálom a energiou tak učiteľov ako aj samotných žiakov a nevedlo to k nežiaducej demotivácii.

V závere tohto stručného prehľadu relevantných aspektov sa nám žiada položiť niekoľko principiálnych otázok:

Sme už dnes na toto všetko pripravení?

Ak zavedieme výučbu CJ do predškolského či do začiatku elementárneho vzdelávania, bude to skutočne v prospech detí a nie na úkor ich celkového zdravého vývinu?

Pomôže to skutočne optimálnemu vývinu ich potenciálu v súlade s požiadavkami doby?

Alebo sa deti budú s neprimeranou námahou snažiť naučiť to, čo by mohli o trochu neskôr dosiahnuť oveľa ľahšie a efektívnejšie?

Aby sme dokázali odpovedať na tieto otázky, musíme rozmýšľať kriticky, dôsledne zvažovať všetky súvislosti a podmienky a predovšetkým zintenzívniť cielený výskum v spolupráci so susednými krajinami, v ktorých sú vzdelávanie, lingvistické a socio-kultúrne podmienky podobné.

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DISCUSSION PAPERS

EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: EXISTING PROBLEMS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Kateřina Dvořáková

Abstract: *This paper aims to contribute to the discussion of introducing foreign languages to the primary school curriculum in the Czech Republic. An early start in FL learning can only be successful when there are appropriate conditions for its implementation. The situation in the Czech Republic, on the verge of launching such a plan, however, is far from optimal. Existing problems will be outlined and contrasted with similar developments in Europe. Further challenges and specific needs in the field will be identified through the results of a survey carried out among teacher trainees with a specialization in English for primary schools.*

Key words: *ELT, young learners, an early start in ELT, pre-service teacher training, qualification of primary English teachers, continuity in FL instruction*

There has been considerable interest in teaching FL to young and very young learners all over the world for almost two decades. At one end of the spectrum, we find countries with a long tradition in this educational area, such as the Scandinavian countries. At the other end, there are countries, such as those in the former Eastern bloc, where early instruction in FL is a relatively new phenomenon brought about by recent socio-political developments.

In the Czech Republic, demands for FL teaching have so far been catered for mainly by private language schools and optional clubs run by many kindergartens and primary schools, all very popular with parents. Even though some primary schools (including those with an extended foreign language programme or the Waldorf school) already offer FL from the very beginning as a standard component of the primary school curriculum, as of the school year 2006/2007, FL instruction will obligatorily begin in Class 3 and in the near future even earlier, as stated by the National Plan for Teaching Foreign Languages.

The intention behind introducing early FL teaching programmes is to lay the foundations for proficiency. As for methodological principles, there seems to be a consensus on what is considered good practice of teaching modern languages to young learners (e.g. task-based approach, TPR, learning to learn,

the need of fun and success, etc). An early start in itself, however, does not guarantee success in the long run. Considering the situation in the Czech Republic, I see several unsettling facts showing that the conditions are not conducive to the successful implementation of FL teaching into the primary school curriculum. The two most alarming ones are:

1. Lack of qualified language teachers

The first and foremost condition for success is a competent teacher. At the moment, more than three quarters of the language teachers at primary schools are unqualified (Faklová, 2000)! Many primary FL classes are taught by secondary teachers, who indiscriminately apply their secondary methods without regard to the diametrically different primary requirements. Moreover, contrary to the claims in the National Plan, there is no tradition of teaching foreign languages to young learners in the Czech Republic. As a teaching practice supervisor at primary school I have witnessed that the grammar-translation method is still the most commonly applied one, the use of innovative or communicatively based methods is scarce, and most teachers do not even use the target language as the vehicle of communication in the classroom. How many experts on CLIL or language awareness courses for preschool children, the two newly proposed innovations, are there in the Czech Republic to train future teachers?

2. Ensuring continuity

Ensuring continuity is an obvious obstacle in the Czech Republic, but it is also a serious issue in most countries (Nikolov and Moon, 2000; Nikolov and Curtain, 2000). This entails problems such as enabling children at secondary level to study the foreign language of their primary school years or building on their acquired skills after transferring to secondary school. Many different variables affect the development of language proficiency, and the lack of continuity turns out to be the most threatening one (Nikolov and Curtain, 2000). Positive learning experiences acquired in primary years will be marred if they are not built upon in secondary school.

Failing to provide competent language teachers from the very beginning and ensure learning continuity is most likely to lead not only to the failure of the Plan, but may also cause irremediable harm to the children and their attitude to foreign languages and learning in general. Also, we may assume that interest in starting early will decrease or fade away if expectations are not fulfilled. One European tendency, particularly alarming for the Czech Republic on the verge of launching the National Plan, is that ministries tend to

sponsor such attractive projects in the initial phase, but withdraw support when the novelty element vanishes! This happened in Italy, Croatia and Scotland (Nikolov and Moon, 2000).

It is not realistic to expect that the number of trained FL teachers will increase significantly in the near future. In addition to the time factor (it takes five years to obtain a master's degree required of teachers by Czech law), our experience at the University of South Bohemia shows that there is rather low interest in the field of primary teaching with a specialization in English. In the past few years, an average of 50 applicants took the entrance exam. Out of the approximately 25 trainees accepted every year, fewer than half complete their studies. The number of trainees in the fifth year was 2 in 2003, 10 in 2004, 11 in 2005, 12 in 2006 and in 2007 there will not be more than 6 trainees in the group!

The main aim of this small-scale survey carried out in February 2006 was to identify problem areas related to the study programme and the teaching profession, elicit possible causes and collect suggestions for improving the programme to make it more appealing for potential applicants in the future. I was also interested in the students' initial motivation to become a primary school teacher with a specialization in English.

A total of 43 students (out of the 57 currently enrolled in the study programme at the University of South Bohemia) returned the questionnaire. The following table shows the number of questionnaires submitted according to the year of study and the respondents' sex.

Year of study (no. of trainees)	1(20)	2 (8)	3 (6)	4 (12)	5 (11)
No. of female respondents	12	4	4	10	9
No. of male respondents	2	1	0	0	1

The questionnaire consisted of the following five open questions:

1. What were your main reasons for choosing the primary study programme with a specialization in English?
2. What, in your opinion, are the causes of the minimal interest in the profession of a primary foreign language teacher?
3. What do you personally find worrying or disquieting about your future as a foreign language teacher at primary school?
4. On the basis of your experience so far, what changes would you make in the primary study programme with a specialization in English?
5. What would, in your opinion, make the primary study programme with a specialization in English more attractive for future students?

Results

Question 1

Year of study	1	2	3	4	5
Interested in working with children at primary school	8	3	4	6	8
Interested in learning or improving English	11	5	4	10	9
Fond of the variety or combination of subjects	3	0	0	4	2
Did not get accepted into their first choice programme	3	1	0	1	2

The first question investigates the students' motivation for choosing their study programme and the two most commonly mentioned reasons are learning or improving language skills (39/43) and working with young learners (29/43). Most respondents say that knowing foreign languages is an absolute must in today's world, they like English as a foreign language and see better chances of finding a job in the future. Some also want to further develop the skills acquired in their previous studies at grammar school. Five trainees explicitly state that they hope to find a job in this field because, at the moment, there are very few qualified primary language teachers.

Becoming a primary teacher requires a wide scope of skills in different fields, which is appealing to nine respondents. They usually describe themselves as all-round people and welcome the wide variety of subjects and often depict them as "enjoyable, fulfilling, meaningful, useful" or as "an ideal combination".

While one respondent passed three different entrance exams and selected this particular specialization, six others admit that it was not their first choice.

Question 2

Year of study	1	2	3	4	5
Low income of a teacher	9	3	0	7	6
Teaching children is a difficult, demanding or not challenging	4	0	4	3	4
Lack of information or opportunities	1	1	0	2	4

Lack of interest in becoming a primary foreign language teacher is attributed to insufficient financial evaluation of a teacher's work by 25 respondents, who often add that "people who speak good English can find much better paid jobs in more prestigious areas". Some respondents, however, would appreciate a wider focus and are unsatisfied because "I can only teach at primary and not at lower secondary" or "graduates cannot expect to find jobs such as translators because their study programme is narrowly focused on teaching children". The generally unsatisfactory state of things in the Czech education system and the low prestige of the profession are also mentioned in connection with this question.

There seems to be a clear awareness of the fact that teaching children is very demanding, especially methodologically, but may not be challenging for people with higher aspirations. A first-year realizes that it is not possible "to have a discussion with children" and a third-year puts forward that "those really interested in the language choose secondary school". Because of the limited scope of foreign language used at primary level, some students are concerned about maintaining their level of English: "primary language teachers must continue developing their language skills in order not to forget". Moreover, the study programme with a specialization is more difficult and takes longer than regular primary school programmes, which might discourage some applicants.

Seven respondents believe that more students could be attracted if there was more specific information about the study programme available, especially on the web pages of teacher training institutions.

There are several other de-motivating reasons listed, but not included in the table, such as bad previous experience in language learning due to low-quality instruction, difficult entrance exams and negative references from graduates.

Question 3

Year of study	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support on the side of primary schools	1	0	4	3	7
Low income of a teacher	2	0	0	2	1
Misconceptions about teaching languages at primary school	0	1	0	1	3
Nothing	9	3	0	2	1

A significant number of respondents (15/43, mostly in their first and second years) does not envisage having any particular difficulties in their future work. These students either have not thought of such a question before or believe that the general lack of language teachers and the necessity to know English guarantee good possibilities of finding a job. They perceive their future rather positively; only two students express a fear of not graduating or a fear of future unemployment. A fourth-year student demonstrates a strong will and determination: "I know that every beginning is difficult but I will manage it because I want to and that's essential." Two fifth year students maintain that, quite on the contrary, "there will be more opportunities to make use of our skills than for people without a specialization".

The more advanced students, who have had practical teaching experience and witnessed school reality, report numerous troublesome areas. The first one has to do with the approach of headmasters:

"Headmasters are usually satisfied when a teacher from the school does a course and teaches English, even though the level is not good." (3rd year student)

"Positions for qualified teachers are taken by unqualified teachers (no qualification for teaching English or for teaching English at lower secondary). There is no willingness to promote qualified applicants."

"Headmasters are interested in a qualification for teaching both primary and lower secondary pupils."

"Some headmasters are not even familiar with the fact that it is possible to study this programme. They tend to underestimate its importance and do not provide good teaching conditions." (according to all 5th year students, most of whom have tried to apply for a job in the field)

The last quotation identifies another disquieting factor – inadequate material conditions and not enough funds for teaching aids. Some fourth-year students wonder whether they will have the freedom to choose teaching methods and materials and express a fear of not finding a job at all and a fear of not getting on well with the rest of the teaching staff.

Financial concerns were mentioned as reasons for low interest in becoming a teacher and appear again in five cases, this time as a disturbing factor in terms of future plans.

The same number of respondents worries about misconceptions about language teaching, not only in the general public but also among teachers:

"It is sad to know that secondary school teachers look down on primary teachers thinking they are just playing with kids."

“The job of a primary teacher is generally considered easy and problem-free, not only among laymen. As a result of this, there are often poor material conditions for quality-teaching.”

Question 4

Year of study	4	5
Stay abroad/more and better native speakers	3	5
More practical focus of all subjects	6	4
Different composition of subjects	4	5
Introducing practical teaching and methodology earlier	6	5

Question 5

Year of study	4	5
Stay abroad/more and better native speakers	8	6
More practical focus of all subjects	3	3
Better future prospects	0	3
Better information about the programme	0	2

Questions 4 and 5 were answered only by the trainees in their final two years of study, as the nature of these questions supposes longer study experience. Two of the suggestions overlap. Most students would appreciate having the opportunity to participate in study abroad stays or have more contact time with native speakers. They would also appreciate it if their subjects were more focused on developing practical skills needed at primary school rather than theoretical knowledge.

From this perspective, some subjects in the programme are considered useless (e.g. chemistry and physics) or overly emphasized (e.g. physical education). Students would “eliminate subjects that are good only for collecting credits” and incorporate more meaningful and useful courses.

More than half of all respondents call for earlier introduction of methodology and practical teaching, at least in the form of observations from the very beginning. Furthermore, teacher trainees express that they want to be trained by professionals with practical experience in teaching languages at primary school. They also realize the importance of integrative or cross-curricular teaching and would like to see “more links among all the subjects”

and “more work with the Framework Educational Programme”, as well as more innovative methods of teaching.

Several answers point to the fact that there is not enough information about the study programme. Suggestions include presentations during open-house days done by graduates, articles in specialized magazines, more advertising on the Internet and even cooperation with primary schools so that trainees could apply for jobs there after graduating.

In terms of motivation, nearly all respondents reveal serious interest in FL. These findings disclose that many applicants might simply apply to learn English properly or get a degree in English with the hope of finding a job in more lucrative areas, such as translating. Many of them, however, are able to see the value of their study choice for their professional teaching future, especially in connection with the earlier introduction of FL into the primary school curriculum. They also find the universal character of their specialization appealing.

There are various issues emerging from this research, some of which can be addressed or dealt with by teacher trainers or training institutions:

- Trainees perceive an imbalance of subjects and propose a more practical focus of courses with clear links to the demands of educational reality.

- The study programme is overloaded (e.g. the number of hours in the fourth and sixth semester amounts to 30 and 35 respectively). Is that reasonable and desirable or should all the departments involved reconsider their requirements?

- Trainees with practical teaching experience report obstacles in the approach of primary schools, such as indifference to the quality of language teaching in the early years and lack of willingness to promote qualified applicants.

- Some trainees fear that their language skills may deteriorate and realize the necessity of continual work in order to balance the relatively limited scope of vocabulary and grammar used at primary.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that apart from the concerns revealed by the research, there are urgent matters, to which teacher training professionals should contribute, considering the particular needs and conditions of the Czech educational context. These include, in the first place, clearly defined learning objectives for the initial stage of foreign language instruction at primary school - realistic, appropriate, taking into account linguistic as well as psychological factors – mainly attitudinal and motivational perspectives. We also need to suggest and develop appropriate instruments of evaluation consistent with teaching methods and consider the profile of a primary teacher

of foreign languages. It would also be very helpful to establish a network of teacher trainers from different institutions in the Czech Republic to create a community of experts with a special focus on early foreign language learning. Moreover, as most studies into young learners in the past two decades have been written in foreign languages, translating key works into Czech would make them available to a wider audience and could provide more expert insight into the issue. And finally, due to the relatively small number of professionals in the field, establishing a joint research team, rather than work in small and isolated groups, may yield more relevant and valuable results.

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Resumé: Tento článek je příspěvkem k diskusi o výuce cizích jazyků na prvním stupni základní školy v českém kontextu. V první části poukazuje na problematické otázky týkající se zahájení cizojazyčné výuky v období předškolního nebo primárního vzdělávání. Je známo, že raná výuka cizích jazyků sama o sobě nevede k jejich lepšímu a trvalejšímu osvojení. Mezinárodní studie (např. Chorvatsko, Maďarsko, Itálie) ukazují, že může být úspěšná a smysluplná pouze pokud jsou pro její uskutečnění vytvořeny náležitě podmínky (především kvalifikovaný učitel a zajištění návaznosti ve výuce mezi jednotlivými stupni). Nezohlednění těchto podmínek v České republice může nejen ohrozit realizaci Národního plánu výuky cizích jazyků, ale může mít též negativní důsledky na motivaci a vztah dětí k cizím jazykům a vést k celkovému snížení zájmu o učení se cizím jazykům v raném věku.

Druhá část příspěvku představuje výsledky výzkumu provedeného na Pedagogické fakultě Jihočeské univerzity v únoru 2006 se studenty učitelství pro 1.stupeň se specializací na výuku anglického jazyka. Cílem této práce bylo prostřednictvím dotazníku s otevřenými otázkami identifikovat problematické oblasti související s tímto studijním oborem a zjistit jejich příčiny. Výzkum ukázal, že poměrně malý zájem o studijní obor vychází z nedostatečného finančního a společenského ocenění práce učitele. Studijní obor se specializací je mnohem náročnější (v některých semestrech překračuje počet vyučovacích hodin 30 týdně). Posluchači si dále uvědomují, že výuka na 1.stupni je didakticky velmi náročná, ale vzhledem k omezené škále probíraných témat neposkytuje prostor pro jejich další jazykový rozvoj. Po absolvování praxe nebo při ucházení se o místo učitele na ZŠ se studenti setkávají s praktickými problémy, jako neadekvátní materiální zázemí pro kvalitní výuku nebo postoj ředitelů ke kvalifikaci. V závěru práce jsou shromážděny studentské návrhy pro optimalizaci studijního oboru a nastíněny aktuální otázky, kterými by se podle mého názoru měla zabývat česká odborná komunita.

WHEN SHOULD CHILDREN START LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN CZECH CONTEXT (FINDINGS OF A OPINION SURVEY)

Šárka Purdjaková

Abstract: *Teaching a foreign language to young children is presently becoming one of the key topics of language teaching methodology. This paper briefly introduces a Ph.D. project and details the findings from a public opinion survey dealing with the question that still remains to be answered, namely when children should start learning a foreign language in the Czech Republic.*

Key words: *bilingualism, early foreign language learning, early foreign language teaching, education reform, immersion, nursery school*

Early Foreign Language Learning

Teaching a foreign language to young children is becoming one of the key topics of language teaching methodology. Some researchers claim and share the view that the younger the individual is when they are exposed to a new language, the greater the probability of acquiring native-like pronunciation as well as proficiency in that language. These theories predominantly maintain that beginning language learners should be taught a new language in the same manner that they acquire their first language. On the other hand other research teams strongly disagree.

My Ph.D. project is a continuation of my diploma thesis which dealt with the phenomenon of bilingualism. It presented a detailed description of bilingualism from a general point of view and presented theoretical findings about what occurs on the linguistic, social, psychological and neurological levels in the process of learning two languages, considering both the simultaneous and the sequential learning of two languages. I observed early childhood learners in an English-language immersion kindergarten to compose detailed case studies. The main point of those case studies was to find out their development and progress in English and to confirm or refute the findings about simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. The conclusions drawn from the case studies served as a basis for formulating guidelines for parents and teachers involved in bilingual education.

However, current project concentrates on early language learning taking place within the context of a limited timetable, rather than bilingual or immersion learning. An analysis of possible similarities in methodology between bilingual education, immersion situation and regular schooling in mainstream schools is a crucial part of my paper.

Opinion Survey

This report details the findings from a public opinion survey done in the Czech Republic. The survey was conducted through a questionnaire with 176 respondents in Brno, in the school year 2005/2006. This data have been weighted to be representative of the teachers in all levels (primary school, secondary school and university) as well as a proportional representation of public. Respondents answered the question when children should start learning a foreign language in Czech context. The objective of the survey was to measure the percentage representation of the respondents' attitude to the given question.

Method - Questionnaire

This empirical probe was carried out by distributing questionnaires in spring 2006 to teachers and also to laic public. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Firstly the respondents filled in all personal details needed for dividing into groups. Secondly the respondents were asked to answer the following question – “When should children start learning a foreign language in the Czech context?”

This contribution shows the percentage result of the findings which was transformed into graphic representation.

Sample

The total number of distributed questionnaires was 200 (80 secondary school teachers, 60 university teachers and 60 “non-teachers” – mainly parents of the children at school). There were 176 questionnaires returned corresponding to 88 % of recoverability of the questionnaires. Thereby we can determine the final representative sample of all respondents which consists of 76 secondary school teachers, 48 university teachers and 52 respondents from non-teachers area (mainly parents of the children at school).

Secondary School Teachers	76
University Teachers	48
Public	52

Tab.1. Respondents of the questionnaire

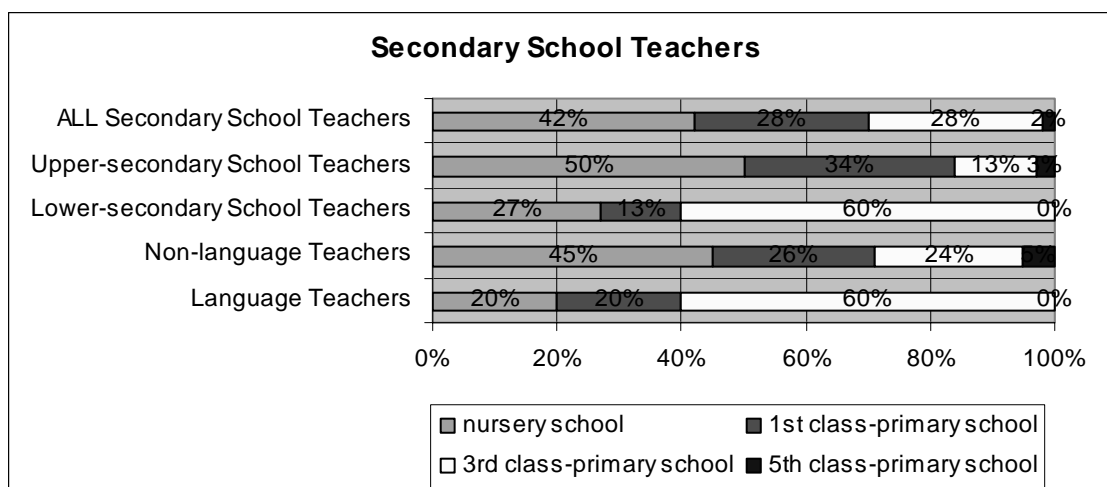
Graphs

The purpose of this survey was to obtain an overview of the opinions held by teachers and the public regarding learning a foreign language and the age at which children should begin.

There are four graphs presented showing the results of the survey. The graphs are split up according to the place of respondents' work. The last graph and table summarize all the previous information demonstrating the differences among the three main groups that were introduced.

Graph 1 – secondary school teachers

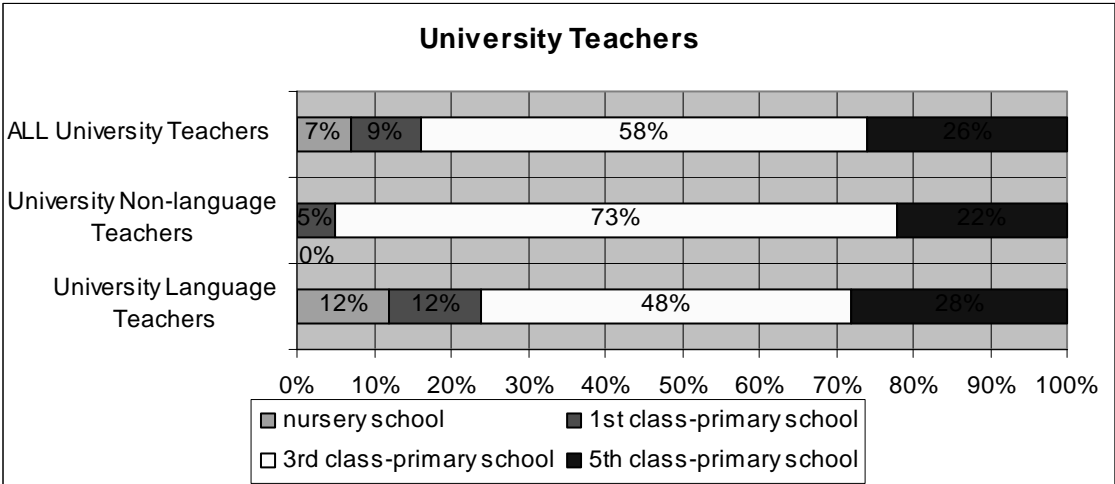
The first paragraph describes the view held by secondary school teachers. There occurred noticeable differences between some groups. Language teachers as well as lower-secondary teachers shared almost the same idea of starting learning the foreign language at not such an early age meanwhile none of them considered the 5th grade suitable as the first meeting with English as a foreign language. On the other hand 45% of non-language teachers and 50% of upper-secondary school teachers would prefer to start learning English from the nursery school.



Graph 1. Secondary school teachers

Graph 2 – university teachers

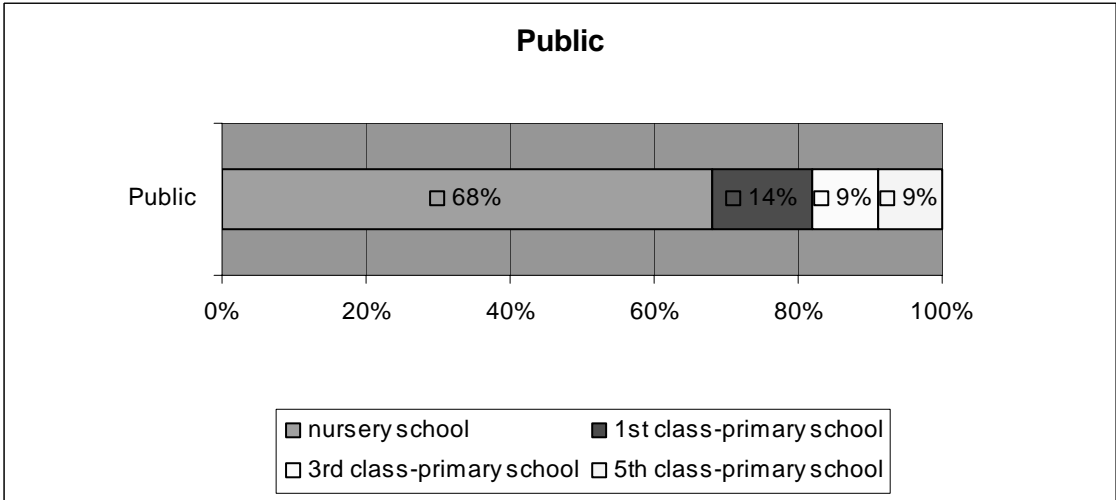
The second graph characterizes attitudes of university teachers. It is obvious that it differs from the first one mainly because of the balance and resemblance in all the groups. Most of them (both language university teachers and non-language university teachers) agreed on starting to learn English from the third class in the primary school.



Graph 2. University teachers

Graph 3 – public

The third graph definitely represents “the sooner the better” view. This may be due to the strong pressure from the media to persuade everyone that going without English is practically impossible.

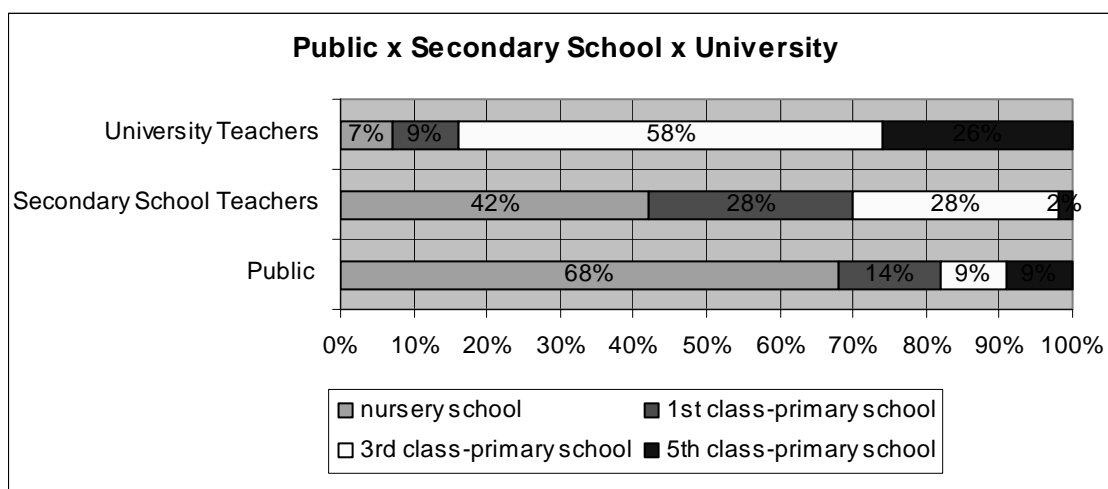


Graph 3. Public

Graph 4 – summary

To sum up, we can see from the graph that the very early start is promoted by the laic public and by most secondary teachers, whereas university teachers are much more reserved.. It indicates that the more one studies this topic, the less likely one is to advocate the early start in teaching languages.

We have transformed the same summarizing into the table where we can compare all the value we have obtained from our survey.



Graph 4. Summary of the survey

START LEARNING ENGLISH FROM THE	Public	Secondary School Teachers	University Teachers
nursery school	68%	42%	7%
1st class-primary school	14%	28%	9%
3rd class-primary school	9%	28%	58%
5th class-primary school	9%	2%	26%

Tab.2. Summary of the Survey

Conclusions and Further Research

The current education reform requires that a foreign language is first taught at primary schools from the third class. We are convinced that this innovation in foreign language teaching should not be reduced simply to lowering the age at which children begin. Suitable methods must be developed and used for

each age group concerned. Therefore, rather than investigating the optimal age of a language learner, we will focus on the primary foreign language teacher and testing the methods they use.

In our research we will be using the multiple research method as the main methodology. This combines both qualitative and quantitative research; specifically case studies of pupils, questionnaires for teachers, interviews with teachers, observation in English classes as feedback, analysing the methods (“what works”), testing what pupils “can do” on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The aim of the investigation, using the multiple research method, is to verify second language teaching methods that are appropriate and recommended for very young learners and to seek innovative solutions in the methodology of foreign language teaching considering their age group.

Ultimately, our research aims to demonstrate that it is crucial to focus on the quality of early foreign language teaching. The research also supports the initial primary language teacher education at university, which would lead to the increase in the effectiveness of the learning/teaching process.

Resumé: *Výuka cizího jazyka dětem se stává jedním z hlavních témat didaktiky cizích jazyků. Tento příspěvek představuje doktorský projekt a prezentuje výsledky průzkumu na stále otevřené téma – kdy by se děti v České republice měly začít učit cizí jazyk. Průzkum demonstroval, že názory laické veřejnosti, které mohou být shrnuty jako “čím dříve, tím lépe”, nejsou sdíleny v odborných kruzích. Zejména učitelé cizích jazyků, kteří pracují s mladšími dětmi, se přiklánějí k zahájení výuky prvního cizího jazyka kolem desátého roku dítěte.*

EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE LIGHT OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Světlana Hanušová, Petr Najvar

***Abstract:** This paper presents the results of the EVYL (English to Very Young Learners) Project. The project was carried out in 2004 - 2006 and its aim was to examine the influence of introducing English at early and very early ages on the performance in English language of prospective students of the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.*

***Key words:** early foreign language learning, young learners*

Background

Early foreign language teaching is a widely discussed phenomenon. Its importance increases in the European context and with the ideas of pluriculturalism and plurilingualism.

Not only the general public but also educational policy makers take the benefits of an early start for granted. In the Action Plan for 2004–06 called Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity, the Commission of the European Communities calls upon the member states to make language learning available to very young learners and suggests that at least two foreign languages should be taught at schools from a very early age. (Action Plan, 2004).

As far as research is considered, Lenneberg's Critical Age Hypothesis (1967) was supported by some authors (Patkowski, 1980, Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). They claim to be able to demonstrate the advantage early starters have over those who start later, especially in the area of native-like pronunciation. These projects were, however, carried out in the situation of total immersion (the British in the Netherlands learning Dutch, and immigrants in America learning English), which is radically different from the socio-cultural context of the Czech Republic.

Different results were produced by a longitudinal study carried out in France by Sophie Genelot in 1991-93. Genelot's research setting bears a greater similarity to our situation. Genelot studied the effects of formal foreign language instruction in mainstream schools. The research sample comprised 1,500 pupils in Dijon. One thousand of them started learning English at primary school, the rest at secondary school. Their success at English was

measured at the end of their first and second year of secondary school (corresponding to a Czech *eight-year gymnázium*). The results show that the benefits of early start are minimal after the first year of secondary school and even smaller at the end of the second year. The only group that benefited from early instruction was that of the most intelligent children. Also, a number of factors more significant than age of acquisition were revealed, such as the social background and general intelligence of the pupils, the methods of instruction and personalities of the teachers (Genelot, 1996). Moreover, the results also indicated that the level demonstrated by the pupils in their mother tongue (French) was lower if English was introduced earlier, as the number of French lessons per week had to be reduced.

A similar large-scale study was carried out by a research team in Belgium, France, Britain, Germany and Italy (Blondin et al, 1998). The conclusions confirm that early age alone does not automatically guarantee success, more important factors being the quality of teaching and the amount of time devoted to learning.

We cannot but agree with Singleton and Ryan (2004, p. 227), who say that “the currently available empirical evidence on the age factor in L2 acquisition is not particularly helpful to those who advocate early L2 instruction”.

Research question

As the popular belief in the Czech Republic and elsewhere has it, the earlier one starts learning a foreign language (English), the better. The EVYL (English for Very Young Learners) research project examines this claim. In the years 2004 - 2006 we carried out the first three phases of the EVYL research project, the aim of which is to contribute to the discussion about effectiveness of teaching languages to young or even very young learners. The results of the first phase have already been discussed in Hanušová, Najvar (2005).

If we are to accept the commonly held views, then the applicants who started learning English earlier in their school career should do significantly better at university entrance exams than those who started learning English later, regardless of various intervening variables (such as personal characteristics, quality of instruction, educational context, social background etc.).

Sample

The sample included 1,827 prospective students of the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic who applied for teacher education courses at the English department in 2004, 2005 and 2006 (529, 665 and 633 participants respectively). Of all applicants in those years, only those

who agreed to fill a short questionnaire where they specified the period in which they started to learn English were included in the sample. As a result of the traditional gender distribution in the teaching profession, the gender distribution in the sample is as follows: 17 per cent male (Nm=307), 83 per cent female (Nf=1520). A typical applicant is aged 19 – 22 (73 per cent in 2004), even though there were also older applicants (over thirty years of age - 7 per cent in 2004), most of them being practising teachers without full qualification.

Method

To determine the participants' language level in English, the scores in the standard Masaryk University Entrance Exam Test of English were taken into account. The test consists of grammar, syntax, spelling, vocabulary and reading comprehension subtests. Graph A shows the distribution of the participants' test scores. In addition, the participants answered a short questionnaire, the key item of which asked them to identify the period in which they started to learn English, the categories being kindergarten (age 3-5), first or second grade (age 6-7), third to fifth grade (age 8-10), sixth to ninth grade (age 11-14) and high school (age 15+). Graph B shows the distribution of the answers in the sample. Non-parametrical tests, namely the Spearman or Kendall test, were employed to measure the correlations between the two variables.

Results

None of the tests carried out so far proved statistically significant correlations between the age in which the participants started learning English and their score in the university entrance English test. As Graph C shows, the distribution of individual cases of the sample in a frequency scatterplot graph implies no correlation between the two variables.

Conclusions

The results, which seem to be contradictory to the popular belief in its most simplified form, indicate that there is no correlation between the age in which the prospective English teachers started learning English and their command of English on the point of entering tertiary education. They suggest the effectiveness of early English language teaching in the Czech Republic (at least in the last 15 years) has been rather low. We find the results relevant and consistent with those of similar studies carried out in similar socio-cultural contexts in Europe.

Although we fully respect the aims set by educational policy makers on both national and European level, we strongly recommend the process of reaching the aims should be carefully considered. A very complicated issue should not be reduced to that of age. The assumed positive effects of early and very early language instruction seem to be levelled with other important variables that intervene in the long process of learning a foreign language. We therefore strongly advise against overemphasising age as a factor in early language teaching.

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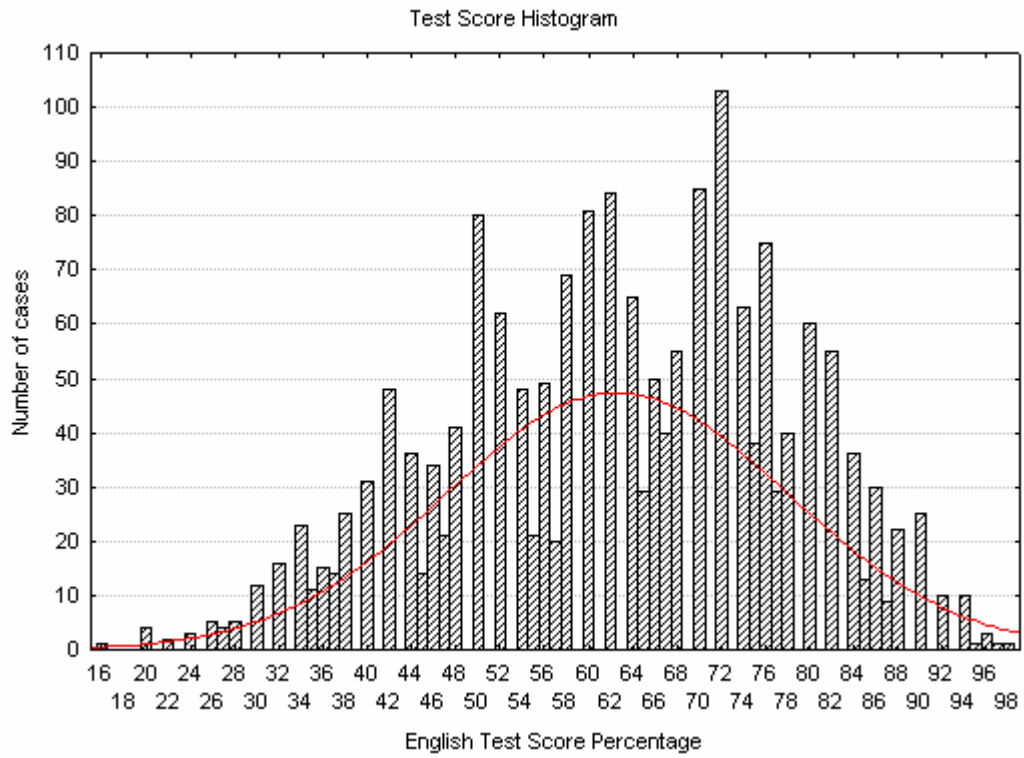
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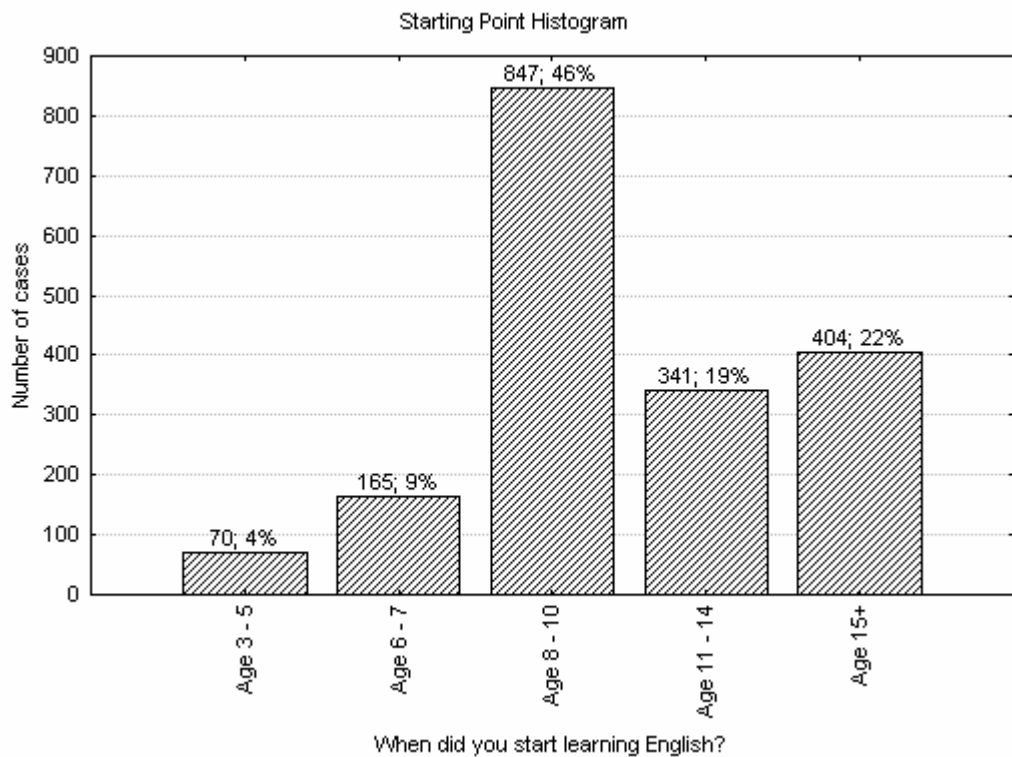
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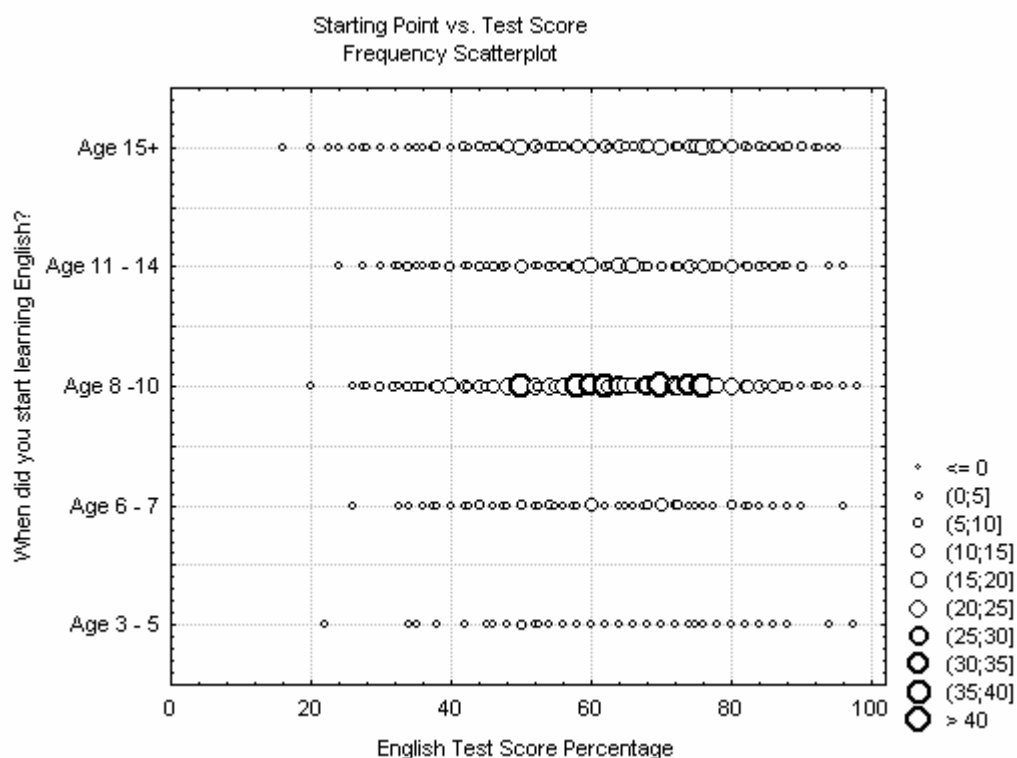
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Graph A



Graph B



Graph C

Resumé: Příspěvek referuje o výsledcích projektu EVYL (English for Very Young Learners – Angličtina pro nejmenší), který probíhal na Pedagogické fakultě Masarykovy univerzity v letech 2004 – 2006. Cílem projektu bylo zkoumání vlivu rané výuky angličtiny na jazykové kompetence zájemců o studium učitelství anglického jazyka na pedagogické fakultě. Zkoumaný vzorek zahrnoval 1827 uchazečů o studium. Výsledky písemného přijímacího testu složeného ze subtestů zaměřených na gramatiku, syntax, pravopis, slovní zásobu a porozumění textu byly korelovány s údajem o věku zahájení osvojování anglického jazyka. Výsledky prokázaly, že neexistuje statisticky významná korelace mezi započatím učení se angličtině v předškolním, příp. mladším školním věku (1., 2. třída ZŠ) a úspěchem u testu.

Výsledky projektu nepotvrzují obecně přijímaný názor, podle něhož brzké započetí učení se cizímu jazyku přináší v dlouhodobé perspektivě lepší výsledky. Autoři příspěvku odkazují také na podobné výzkumy, které byly v devadesátých letech 20. století realizovány v evropském kontextu a které dospěly ke shodným závěrům (výzkumy S. Genelot, rozsáhlý výzkum týmu C. Blondina).

ENGLISH AS A GAME?

Helena Havlíčková

Abstract: *This paper offers an insight into the gap between the ambitious project of the Ministry of Education to introduce English into kindergartens and the reality. It discusses the need to prepare a good curriculum, adequate resources, about the need to educate pre-school English teachers and the need to state clear outcomes and achievements before the project starts.*

Key words: *children, kindergarten, pre-school age, teachers in kindergartens, curriculum, learning skills.*

“They will learn through games, rhymes and songs.” This is what can frequently be heard or read in connection with the intention of bringing English into kindergartens. This is also what the students substituting English teachers in kindergartens have been doing with children so far, as indicated in informal interviews with these students. Is it really so easy?

Anyone who has ever watched children from three to six must shout an emphatic No! English language learning is a global phenomenon. It is little wonder that the tendency to start as early as possible is prevailing. The belief that very young learners learn language better than older ones appears to be the most likely reason for a huge increase in special English courses for children. Some of our kindergartens are already offering special English lessons and ambitious parents have enlisted their children immediately ignoring the fact that there are hardly any well-prepared pre-school English teachers. Attending such English lessons is not a good use of a child’s time. In such an important period of their life-time when children should run and jump and climb and move as much as possible, they sit in a circle, look at pictures, clap their hands or walk in a circle reciting strange sounds with a Hanka or a Jana who have studied English at a secondary school or who have not finished their English studies at a faculty yet. The amount they learn in one lesson is insignificant compared to what they will learn in one lesson at primary and secondary school. English is unlikely to disappear soon. Children would be better advised to take up English later. Little will be lost. Children do only have one chance at childhood, however, and this must not be squandered. Some researchers find that lower-order processes, such as pronunciation, are learnt better when children are young, while higher-order processes, such as grammar, relationships between words, etc. are learnt better after puberty. “We can only conclude that an early start is not, in itself, automatically an

advantage; an early start is influenced by many learner factors ... These include levels of motivation and confidence, differences in language aptitude and personality. These must be taken together with contextual factors, such as the quality of teaching” (Brumfit, 1994).

Beside language, pre-school children are taught physical skills, they train certain muscles to be able to clean their teeth, to colour, to draw, to write later, to tie their shoelaces. They are also taught social skills. Children gradually become aware of the relation to others; they discover what “share and co-operate” means. Starting with group work at the very beginning could end up in a complete failure. Children also have to be taught the skill of learning. It is the teacher who helps them to walk along the paths of learning and discover the magic of knowledge.

If we ignore these requirements and fail to provide high-quality materials and appropriately trained teachers, the experience may be negative and the results counter-productive.

Ambitious parents are a relatively small group; but now the whole Ministry of Education is ambitious, and not taking into account the fact that though there are many very young learners who could be taught English, there are not very many teachers with the adequate linguistic and pedagogical skills: “...effective teachers can help learners to progress rapidly at any level of schooling” (Brumfit, 1994). The aim of having sufficient numbers of well-trained pre-school language teachers is particularly crucial. Good methodology based on the psychology of a very young learner, on a profound knowledge of early language acquisition and, of course, a good knowledge of English should form the starting point of “English into Kindergartens” marathon. “The general aims of early foreign language learning should appear attractive to parents, teachers and administrators and workable for children, while avoiding being over-ambitious and unrealistic” (Brewster, 2004).

Integrating English into other activities in the kindergarten, rather than separate English lessons, would be a path worthy of further investigation. This would imitate a bilingual environment. Regular routines of the day could be used to make the most of the English language (e.g. dressing, eating, playtime, bath time and bedtime). Out of the routines mentioned in brackets, our kindergarten English lessons use just playtime so far. We can expect little improvement in the near future if we take into account the level of education of our English teachers teaching in kindergartens. A large number of primary English teachers are unqualified and there is even a larger number of those teaching English at kindergartens. They may be well-trained pre-school teachers, but they are not by and large trained language teachers.

Pre-school English teachers have a much wider responsibility than just teaching English. They should bear in mind the education of the whole child

when planning their English teaching programme. The time devoted to pre-school and later primary school education is extremely important in a child's development. It involves their intellectual, physical, emotional, and social progress.

A good English teacher speaks to a child in English. They use gestures to show what they are talking about. They talk about what they are doing, speak slowly so that the children have a chance to grasp the words. An ideal teacher plays with children face-to-face in small groups. This gives the children the best opportunity to see how the teacher's lips are moving to make the words. They give the child a chance to communicate after they have asked a question. It is necessary to establish a realistic balance between English and the mother tongue. There are situations where too much English could be less economical and more frustrating. Children at this age often like to play and work alone, though in the company of others. Thus group games so often trumpeted are not always an optimal way of teaching English to very young children. A more individual approach is essential. An ideal teacher reads to children every day for a short time. They repeat and repeat. Through the repetition of stories, rhymes, songs and typical phrases, children learn new words and good pronunciation. Games, songs and rhymes are the kinds of activities that work well. They also need to be integrated with actions, other tasks that involve cutting, colouring and sticking. Total physical response cannot be neglected. All activities should have an obvious communicative value. They should be mostly orally-based as very young learners cannot read and write even in their native language. It is helpful if the mother tongue is prepared in the background in cases of emergency.

A tendency to realize this approach can be seen in *Mateřská škola Ostrava-Poruba, Nezvalovo náměstí 856* (Zapletalová, 2006). English language is integrated into the activities during the whole day spent at school, but it seems to be restricted to rhymes, games and songs. Daily routines and common life are excluded. At least English is not just cocooned in special English lessons.

Private nursery schools are more courageous, and also more expensive as, for example, *Soukromá mateřská škola ABC Academy, Praha 3, Na Vrcholu*. Some children attending this school are English speaking foreigners and so are the teachers (Šteflová, 2005). Entering the school in the morning children enter a real English atmosphere. They come back into the Czech world again after school when their parents appear and pick them up. In the third year of school attendance, children speak fluent English according to the school manager. On the other hand there are some misgivings about whether other aspects of education have not been neglected, such as children's physical, emotional, and social development, as these teachers who are native speakers have not had specific training in teaching children.

How many of the good attempts mentioned above exist in our nursery school so far? Does the Ministry of Education take into consideration that pre-school English teachers have not been qualified yet? Or do they believe that it is not worth searching for good teachers for children? It would seem that anyone knowing a few English sentences would satisfy their ambitious project. There are good ways of teaching English at kindergartens, but they cannot be employed without good preparation.

Dr. Eva Opravilová (a lecturer in primary pedagogy at Charles University, Prague) writes: “I admit that as soon as we have really qualified pre-school English teachers, we will be able to introduce certain system into second language acquisition in nursery schools. It is a demanding task for the future. Anyhow, nowadays our schools preparing future teachers for kindergartens lack the capacity to teach language and ELT methodology” (Opravilová, 2006).

The process of bringing English into kindergartens cannot be stopped now. English is a lingua franca of the whole world and many countries have already started teaching English to pre-school children. It is our obligation to prepare adequate conditions for the process as quickly as possible.

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Resumé: Příspěvek se zabývá nepoměrem mezi velkými ambicemi ministerstva školství, které usiluje o zavedení výuky angličtiny do předškolních zařízení a realitou postrádající fundované učitele angličtiny. Připomíná nutnost připravit řádné kurikulum pro předškolní výuku angličtiny, připravit aprobované učitele, kteří budou umět nejen anglicky, ale budou erudovaní v předškolní pedagogice a psychologii, budou zdatní v didaktice angličtiny zaměřené na předškolní věk žáků. Rovněž je třeba připravit výukové materiály, k nimž nepatří pouze učebnice, ale též další doplňující materiály, pomůcky, výchovné hračky.

Příspěvek rovněž zdůrazňuje nesmírnou zodpovědnost předškolních učitelů angličtiny, neboť současně s výukou zásadně výchovně formují mladého člověka v době, kdy si dítě teprve vytváří návyky a svá měřítká hodnot, svou vlastní soustavu pravidel kompatibilní s pravidly společenskými. Chtít a nařít, což zjednodušeně vystihuje přístup ministerstva, neznamená ještě zdárně realizovat. Nekvalifikovaný učitel, zvláště v práci s touto věkovou skupinou dětí, je schopen, jakkoli nevědomky, nadělat škody, které lze v pozdějším věku dítěte jen stěží odstranit. V době, kdy média opakovaně hovoří o tristní situaci ve školách, kde marně shánějí kvalifikované učitele angličtiny, se ministerstvo pouští do hazardního podniku: bez řádně promyšlené přípravy zavádí výuku angličtiny do stále nižších vzdělávacích stupňů.

THE TEACHER – THE MOST IMPORTANT AGENT FOR EDUCATING VERY YOUNG LEARNERS

Naděžda Vojtková

Abstract: *This paper considers optimum conditions for teaching young learners, paying particular attention to the competences of the teacher. Some published materials for pre-school children are analysed and the skills a teacher should possess to be able to exploit fully those materials are discussed.*

Key words: *teaching young learners, foreign language learning, teaching materials*

Introduction

The Czech government has recently published the country's Action Plan for language education. In line with the trends in other European countries, the Czech Republic wants to introduce foreign language teaching one year earlier in compulsory education, i.e. from the age of nine. The document also recommends offering "teaching" a foreign language even at a pre-school level.

I personally believe that this is a good move because as we are a small country people will need a very good command of foreign languages to be competitive in the European market. However, at the same time as a professional English teacher I am aware of the obstacles that can appear on the way forward and that can completely ruin the good intentions.

In my contribution I would like to set up basic conditions for successful language teaching and learning of young learners which will be based on literature and then investigate the one, which in my opinion, is the most important namely, the teacher. I will analyse some published materials for very young learners and identify the skills and competences that the teacher should have to be able to exploit those materials to their full potential.

Optimum conditions for TEYL

According to Rixon (2003) documents produced by educational authorities in many countries justify the early introduction of a foreign language with many arguments which she divides into two main categories:

- benefits that are connected with the position and importance of the language in a country
- benefits that derive from the nature and needs of children

Let us look at the first of them now in the Czech context. In the Czech Republic, English, which is probably the first foreign language, still has the status of a foreign language. This means that although it is important for people's careers, it is not the widespread means of communication in the country yet and people can easily live without it in the Czech Republic. For language learning it means that learners will not get much exposure to the language outside the classroom and this is one important consideration that the planning teams need to bear in mind for TEYL. It is necessary to consider creating authentic situations for foreign language acquisition for young learners outside the classroom because this increases the motivation to learn and use the language.

The second category that Rixon states in her article refers to the benefits for children who start learning a foreign language at a young age:

- breaking down cultural barriers or at least enlarging cultural horizons
- helping the child's cognitive development
- contributing to the child's general language awareness, not least through the comparison of the first language with the new language
- forming positive and confident attitudes to the learning of other languages in later life
- leading to higher achievement in the language in secondary school and in adult life.

Of course, the success of foreign language instruction and exploiting those benefits depends on the ways of implementation of young learners' programmes. One can identify plenty of good and bad examples in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, they have not been studied and analysed properly yet so we have to rely on the research and analysis coming from abroad. The most cited large scale evaluation of an early language learning project is that of Burstall et al (1974) and the lessons to be learned from this experience and the way in which it was evaluated are summarised by Khan (1991).

Is younger better?

In the light of the research I would like to change the question:

In what conditions is younger better? What factors can make a difference in teaching English to YLs? What are the optimum conditions?

According to Rixon, the lessons that could be learnt from the research are:

“Results can vary greatly often in relation to a factor that takes years of training and considerable investment of government funds to bring to an optimum condition: the quality of the teacher’s own command of the foreign language. This affects both the model of language that can be provided and the type of methodology adopted. It can easily be seen that a teacher who lacks confidence and fluency in the language is unlikely to be able to set up the occasions for genuine interaction. These factors are crucial for the YL. Firstly, it is widely accepted that one area in which YL are superior learners is in their ability to imitate a pronunciation model. There is a strong case, therefore, for ensuring that the models available are acceptable ones. Secondly, without adequate opportunities to engage in genuine interaction with other users of the foreign language, another agreed capacity of YL will go to waste.

One of the most important factors with regard to long term success in the language is the way in which transition from the primary to the secondary school is handled. Without careful liaison between the two levels, and planned use of the children’s achievements at primary school, there is every danger that the language will be re-started 'from zero' in the new school, with consequent loss of pace and progress and usually of motivation on the part of the pupils.”
(Rixon, 2003)

Teachers

I would like to investigate more closely the position of the teacher in the learning/acquisition process. As we can see from the research findings “the quality of the teacher’s own command of the foreign language” can make a difference in the effectiveness of early language learning projects. In the Czech Republic there are still quite a lot of people who think that the teacher’s language proficiency does not have to be very high if they are to teach young learners. People who are more informed in the field say that it is the pronunciation that has to be good but generally the teacher will be using the basic language structures in their lessons which does not require high proficiency. I want to challenge this view using the arguments that are based on some recently published materials for pre-school children. What do they require from the teacher?

I looked at three courses that were published in 2005 and 2006.

Reilly, V. (2005). *Cookie and friends*. Oxford: OUP.

Morris, J., Ramsden, J. (2005). *Here's Patch, the puppy*. Macmillan.

Selby, C., McKnight, L. (2006). *Hippo and Friends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

All of these courses are aimed at pre-school children from 4 to 7. Their authors have had a long experience in teaching very young learners and they based their materials on recent psychological, pedagogical and methodological findings. All three courses have got similar approach as to how to develop the foreign language with VYL. They are all song and story based with a lot of support materials for the teacher. They consist of a picture book with stories and songs which can be torn off and given to the children one by one so that they can look at them and play with them at home, the books have got stickers for the children to recycle vocabulary and extra photocopiable worksheets to work on in the lessons. The teacher's pack includes a puppet, story posters, a set of flashcards, audio material, teacher's book.

The authors are aware of the fact that the primary aim at this stage of education is the development of the whole child, so general educational aims take priority: "this is achieved through involving the learners wherever possible and through activities that improve eye-to-hand co-ordination, gross and fine motor skills, as well as spatial, personal, and social and emotional skills" (*Cookie and friends*, Teacher's Book).

All three courses try to integrate English into a pre-school syllabus.

The linguistic aims come next:

"Very young children exposed to English will be involved in an acquisition process rather than a learning process and therefore materials need to reflect and follow the natural acquisition process stages, i.e. their receptive ability is way in advance of their productive ability....children receive lots of comprehensible input and are involved in activities where they show understanding non-verbally." (*Here's Patch, the puppy*, Teacher's Book)

Finally, all the authors stress the importance of the development of positive attitudes to learning a foreign language.

The attitude aims "to introduce children to English and motivate them through attractive and enjoyable activities, to enhance their confidence with attainable goals and to encourage personal effort, to provide them with situations where they will need or want to try to communicate in English." (*Cookie and friends*, Teacher's Book)

The methodology of all three courses is very similar:

They use songs and stories as a springboard for presenting and recycling the language. Puppets that communicate with children establish an affective link with them, introduce routines, instructions. The courses have Worksheet or Time for desk activities where children learn through doing and making things. All three courses stress the importance of routines in classes, fun and games, and they also set some principles for the use of the mother tongue. A new element in the courses is the help for the teacher in terms of communicating with parents which is very important because the parents often have unrealistic expectations from pre-school courses. The teachers are also advised how to monitor the progress of the children and evaluate the effectiveness of the course.

What are the implications for the teachers who want to teach pre-school children?

All materials are well-designed with a lot of creative activities that reflect new psychological and pedagogical findings. As such they require certain abilities, skills and competences from the teachers who will use them. They do not specify them explicitly however they are clearly implied.

1. The teacher's own command of the language:

The teachers should provide the majority of the language exposure, i.e. they should use the language for communicative purposes in the lessons, talk to children all the time, rephrasing several times their utterances so that they are comprehensible to the child. It should be similar to the situation when the children learn their first language. As the materials are based on stories the teacher should provide the scaffolding, by which language and cognitive abilities of the children are developed through interaction with the person who is more skilled. Of course, this can happen in the children's mother tongue but if the children are to acquire the language they need to be exposed to it as much as possible.

The children are said to be very good imitators and what they can do better than adults is imitate pronunciation. That is why the teacher is expected to use good pronunciation with correct stress and intonation.

Looking briefly at these descriptions of the functions that the teacher should be using in the lessons it can be concluded that the teacher should be at least an independent user of the language in some areas and a proficient user in others, which in the Common European Framework of Reference levels means B2 to C1 levels.

The global scale description for the two levels is as follows:

B2 – Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

C1 – Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

In the receptive skills area the teachers should be able to study the teacher's books and other supporting materials and also follow the discussions in the field. It is also known that the command of the language is developed through receptive skills so even though the teachers will not use complicated listening or reading texts in the lessons they have to develop their own language.

In the productive skills area the most important words are "spontaneity", "fluency" and "flexibility". In practical terms it means that the teacher should feel comfortable using English, should be able to adapt the language for the children's needs.

2. The teacher's teaching competence

The teacher should be a specialist in educating very young learners, knowing their needs and cognitive capacities. She should do activities that children like doing generally, the only difference being the means of communication – English. And again even here the language plays the crucial role. If the teacher cannot communicate in English with ease it would be very difficult for her to apply appropriate methods. So the most probable way of teaching would be parroting some songs and rhymes again and again. The teacher cannot apply the suggested methods if her language competence does not allow her to do it.

3. *The teacher's attitude to the language*

The teacher can be motivated to learn the language because she is to use it with the children, however, if she does not feel comfortable and confident in using it there will always be tension in the lessons. Children are very sensitive and they can recognise when somebody is not confident and happy. It can influence their attitude to the language.

In other words, as one of the authors puts it: "It is important both for the teacher and for the learners to enjoy the lessons." (Selby, 2006)

Conclusions

In this paper, I have tried to show that although introducing English or any other language at an early age can be beneficial both for the society and for the children, it can also be very dangerous if the potential of either is wasted. The programmes of TEYL should be prepared very carefully and special attention should be paid to teachers as crucial agents of the process. I wanted to stress the importance of the language competence both for the quality of the teaching and for the confidence of the teacher.

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Resumé: Příspěvek se zamýšlí nad pozitivním přínosem výuky jazyků u předškolních dětí.

Z literatury a výzkumu vyplývá, že pozitivní přínos má pro děti jen taková forma jazykového vzdělávání, která se blíží způsobu osvojování rodného jazyka. Klíčovým faktorem úspěšnosti vzdělávání je učitel. Autorka analyzovala tři nové výukové materiály pro předškolní děti a snažila se definovat požadavky, které tyto materiály kladou na jazykovou a metodickou vybavenost učitele. V oblasti jazykové kompetence učitele vyžadují tyto materiály úroveň B2 až C1 podle Společného evropského referenčního rámce pro jazyky. Autorka vycházela z pokynů a návodů v učitelských manuálech, které celkem jasně charakterizují role a situace, v nichž učitel jazyk používá. Kompetence učitele anglického jazyka zahrnují nezbytně i kompetence jazykové. Učitel, který neovládá jazyk na patřičné úrovni, nemůže aplikovat a využívat navržené metody. V neposlední řadě je důležitý učitelův vztah k vyučovanému jazyku a jeho sebevědomí při přirozeném používání jazyka.

V závěru autorka varuje před ukvapeným zavedením jazykového vzdělávání pro předškolní děti. Pokud nechceme plýtvat potenciálem, který jazykové programy pro předškolní děti nabízejí, musíme především řádně jazykově a pedagogicky připravit učitele.

TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE INTEGRATED PRIMARY CLASSROOM

Rita Collins & Helena Titlová

Abstract: *In any discussion about teaching a foreign language to young children, it is necessary to consider the inclusion of pupils with learning disabilities. As general classes are integrated, teachers, administrators and university programs must examine effective methods for teaching English to a broader range of learners. Which skills should be introduced at the beginning? What strategies help children with learning disabilities acquire English? Does the age of the pupil make a difference when learning English as a second language?*

Key words: *specific learning disabilities, foreign language learning, learning strategies, integrated classes*

Introduction

As educators, administrators and education ministers discuss offering English as a foreign language to young children, it is important to remember the reality of classrooms in the 21st century. Children with learning disabilities are integrated into general classes. A primary school teacher works with a very broad range of learners. What does this mean when introducing English as a foreign language in primary schools? What strategies will teachers use when teaching English to children with and without learning disabilities, and what other factors should be considered when introducing foreign language instruction? This topic is one that has recently received more attention from researchers and educators as both inclusion and early foreign language instruction become more common practices. The purpose of this paper is to examine foreign language instruction in integrated primary school classes, and the questions that remain to be investigated.

Connecting the Dots

When examining the need for new curriculum and materials for English language learning in integrated primary school classes, there are a number of factors which should be considered: general knowledge about children with learning disabilities, the impact of learning disabilities on foreign language learning, the target language and the age of the learner.

There has been extensive research into specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, etc.) and effective teaching strategies. A comprehensive review of the literature indicates two methods that seem most useful in producing academic gains: direct instruction and learning strategies instruction (*Understanding Learning Disabilities*, 2005). Developing stronger phonological awareness has also been strongly indicated as beneficial for children studying English (Lyon, 1994; Ganschow, Sparks, 1995). Orton-Gillingham is a well-established multisensory approach that focuses on phonological development for instruction of young children. As educational researchers identify effective strategies, they also stress the importance of beginning instruction for children with learning disabilities as early as possible. Lyon (1994) at the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development encouraged school districts to assess young children for learning difficulties as early as possible, and provide instruction in phonological awareness as well as other reading strategies before the third grade when feasible. Most studies support introducing phonic instruction in the first grade in a structured and systematic way. Academic interventions for children with learning disabilities in later grades often require a greater effort for smaller gains.

Although research on learning disabilities has been extensive, it primarily examines learning to read, write and speak in one's native language. Some studies have investigated the impact of learning disabilities on foreign language learners although these have mostly examined older students. Dinklage (1971), one of the first to investigate the issues students with learning disabilities encounter when taking foreign languages courses, focused on participants at the university level. Ganschow and Sparks (1995) concluded that phonological deficits hampered the acquisition of a foreign language for students with learning disabilities; their research was applied to high school students studying Spanish in the United States. Later Schneider (1996) investigated different approaches for teaching a foreign language to 'at-risk learners,' but, as with Dinklage, the research was limited to university-aged students. A more recent study of Dutch 'poor readers' learning English tested adolescents (van der Leij, Morfidi, 2006). Most of those studies looking at teaching a foreign language to a person with a learning disability, were conducted with older students, not with primary school children.

Another situation exists in North America where the concern is teaching English to non-native speakers who have learning disabilities. These studies are usually limited to adults in ESL programs (Schwarz, 1997) or children in

public schools whose first language is not English. Some conclusions and strategies gained from this area of investigation may be applicable in countries such as the Czech Republic, although the results would be more pertinent to English language immersion programs.

In situations where learners have a choice of which foreign language to study, it is possible to select a language that has more transparency than English, such as Spanish or Italian. Some research looking at high school or university students with learning disabilities investigated differences between specific foreign languages. A document from Georgia State University (n.d.) encouraged students with learning difficulties to consider the type of language they decide to study.

For example, Spanish has regular sound/symbol correspondences making word decoding and spelling easier (phonology). Latin is a language that is primarily read, reducing the demands of oral communication. Chinese is a language with a logographic (symbol-word relationship) system rather than an orthographic system (symbol-sound relationship). (*Strategies for Helping Students*, n.d.)

Unfortunately, this is not applicable in European schools which now usually require English as the first foreign language for young learners.

Although different aspects from previous studies can be applied, there is a lack of research specifically about young children in integrated classrooms who are introduced to English as a foreign language. Within these limitations, strategies for providing foreign language instruction to children with learning disabilities will be discussed.

Effective Strategies

Drawing from work that has been done with young children with learning disabilities, four strategies are consistently mentioned both for children studying in their first language and in primary ESL programs: phonological awareness, direct instruction, multisensory instruction, and learning skills. Children with learning disabilities need explicit and structured instruction in phonics and phonological awareness (Lyon, 1994). Mastering the sound-letter combinations and building a vocabulary of phonetically regular words is essential for learning to read and write English. This is an area that needs to be stressed with young learners (as well as teachers) since often a new language

is introduced in a less structured way. Using intensive phonics instruction can be beneficial as well as motivating for children when done in an interactive manner. Incorporating these instructional elements into a language lesson is extremely useful for students with learning disabilities as well as non-disabled children.

Direct instruction begins with explaining the learning objective and establishing expectations, then introducing the skill and modeling it, providing an opportunity for guided practice with feedback, and finally allowing the child to practice the skill independently and to use it in various situations (National Adult Literacy, 1999). Multisensory instruction utilizes as many senses as possible when introducing new materials and having children practices skills. Visual, tactile, auditory and kinesthetic activities should be incorporated into lessons (Wadlington et al., 1996). Sand trays, colored letters, singing, and physically “building” sentences are examples of techniques that are helpful for children with learning disabilities as they acquire knowledge about sounds and words.

Learning skills for children in primary school can range from learning how to organize their individual study materials (color coding different subjects, using separate notebooks) to developing an awareness of how they learn best. Children with learning disabilities can gradually be given opportunities for self-evaluation and understanding their individual learning styles or preferences. Dialogue journals, modeling problem-solving strategies and allowing children in the class to talk about how they study effectively are useful ways of developing metacognitive awareness. Another factor in helping children to incorporate successful learning strategies is providing support and motivation (Schiff & Calif, 2004). Young learners must see the value in acquiring specific skills and developing effective learning strategies.

Other variables that need to be considered when implementing English instruction in integrated primary classes are: the level of teacher awareness and knowledge, instructional materials, and curricular design. As this is a very brief overview of the most important methods though, stress is given to phonological awareness, direct instruction that incorporates a multisensory approach and learning strategies.

Implications for Further Research

More research is required in order to teach English as a foreign language effectively in integrated primary programs. Although it is possible to apply

knowledge obtained from other studies such as working with children with learning disabilities in their first language or with older students, more specific information would be beneficial in understanding how young children can best be served when learning a foreign language. Successful strategies used with British and American children with learning disabilities could be applied and the results analyzed when teaching English as a foreign language. Are approaches such as the Orton-Gillingham method that have proved effective with young English speaking children also effective with learners of English as a foreign language? Research in English speaking countries has found that starting as early as possible (ages 5 – 6 years) is best when teaching children with learning disabilities. Is this also the right practice when introducing foreign language instruction in integrated classes? Studies with older students who have learning disabilities have found a need for specific phonological instruction in both L1 and L2. Would this also be appropriate with primary school children?

There is a strong (and growing) foundation of research in educational methods for teaching children with learning disabilities. Now as English is introduced to integrated primary classes in countries such as the Czech Republic, it becomes imperative to expand this research base to include teaching English as a foreign language to young children in integrated classes.

Conclusion

As schools begin introducing English as a foreign language earlier in the educational process and children with learning disabilities are placed in integrated classes, it is vital that stakeholders become more knowledgeable about serving all learners in these classrooms. Research on teaching children with learning disabilities in their first language indicates that when students are given appropriate instruction at an early age, they are able to achieve age-appropriate results. A foundation of phonological development and direct, multisensory instruction and investigation of specific aspects of teaching English to non-native speakers are starting points. For learning to be successful for children in an integrated class, more research is recommended to enhance English language acquisition. Teachers, universities and government agencies need to be actively involved in addressing the questions that remain to ensure effective foreign language learning for all children.

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Resumé: *V kontextu zavádění výuky angličtiny do stále nižších ročníků primární školy je důležité mít neustále na mysli realitu českých tříd na počátku 21. století; zejména vzhledem k tendenci integrovat do běžných tříd žáky se specifickými poruchami učení, což pro učitele primární školy znamená pracovat s velmi širokým spektrem žáků. Tento fakt vnáší do problematiky rané výuky cizích jazyků v České republice nové otázky, jako například: Jaké vyučovací strategie budou učitelé využívat při výuce angličtiny dětí se specifickými poruchami učení a bez nich? Ačkoli existují rozsáhlé výzkumy specifických poruch učení, tyto se zejména zaměřily na schopnost naučit se číst a psát v rodném jazyce; studie, jež se věnovaly dopadu SPU na schopnost učit se cizím jazykům, zkoumaly zpravidla starší žáky. Velmi důležitými oblastmi výzkumu jsou ty, věnující se tématům efektivních strategií ve výuce cizích jazyků, učitelových kompetencí, výukových materiálů, či kurikulárního designu. V tomto příspěvku se zabýváme problematikou výuky cizích jazyků v integrované třídě 1. stupně základní školy a otázkami, kterým je třeba se dále věnovat.*

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