

The background features a dark blue grid of squares. Overlaid on this grid are numerous 3D rectangular blocks in various colors including yellow, green, red, and blue. These blocks are scattered across the page, some appearing to be stacked or floating, creating a dynamic and geometric visual effect.

Teaching English at Primary Level

**Silva Bratož
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From Theory into the Classroom

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning

EFL – English as a foreign language

FL – Foreign language

FLL – Foreign language learning

FLT – Foreign language teaching

L1 – First/source language

L2 – Second/target language

TL – Target language

TEYL – Teaching English to young learners

YL – Young learner

YLLs – Young language learners

YLS – Young learners

Introduction

The main purpose of the book is to explore the key principles and several practical considerations related to teaching English in the primary classroom (pupils 6 to 12 years of age). Over the last 20 years, we have witnessed the publication of a number of comprehensive guides to research and issues surrounding the teaching of a foreign language to young learners, references such as *The Primary English Teacher's Guide* (Brewster et al., 2002), *Teaching Young Language Learners* (Pinter, 2006), *Teaching Languages to Young Learners* (Cameron, 2001), *Teaching English to Young Learners: Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 Year Olds* (Bland, 2015), *Innovative Practices in Early English Language Education* (Valente & Xerri, 2022), and a great number of others which have been consulted and referred to extensively in this book. However, teaching English or other foreign languages to primary school learners is a fast-developing and exciting area which has taken many turns and encountered various challenges. It is also fair to say that we are living in a fast-changing world which has far-reaching implications for the young learners' classroom. One of such changes is undoubtedly the wide accessibility of web-based resources and learning spaces which provide plenty of opportunities for learning foreign languages more independently and autonomously.

The boundless possibility of being exposed to both spoken and written forms of a foreign language in authentic online environments is an important factor in language teaching which needs to be taken into account at all levels of instruction. This is also related to one of the most significant challenges in the primary classroom today, namely the varying degrees of pupils' background knowledge which may range from beginner to advanced levels already in the first grades of primary school. One of the implications of this phenomenon is that teachers and teacher educators should dedicate considerable efforts to developing more efficient strategies for teaching mixed-ability classes. It is the aim of the present book to capture these new developments and provide pre-service and in-service teachers with an overview of the fundamental concepts which underlie foreign language teaching for this age group and at the same time present them with practical guidelines and reflection activities to create efficient primary classroom teaching practice.

Before we continue, it is worth looking at some terms which will be used

throughout the book. As mentioned above, the main focus of the book are children at primary level aged 6 to 12. The term 'young learners' is commonly used in English to cover different age groups, from 3 to 11/12 (Pižorn, 2009) or from 5 to 14 (Pinter, 2006) and there is general consensus to refer to children who have not yet started compulsory schooling (3-6 years old) as 'pre-primary' or 'very young learners' (Reilly & Ward, 1997). This distinction is important because of the differences in the physical, psychological, social, emotional, conceptual and cognitive development of young learners in these age groups, leading to very different approaches and strategies to teaching (Ellis, 2014). In the present book, the terms 'young learners' (YLS) and 'young language learners' (YLLs) are used to refer to children at primary level, from age 6 to 11/12.

Another set of terms which needs clarifying is related to the kind of language being taught. 'Foreign language' usually refers to a non-native language formally taught and used within the school curriculum and not as a means of communication outside school. On the other hand, the term 'second language' is used to refer to a non-native language which has a special status in a particular environment, serving as a medium of education, administration or business (Crystal, 2003). A good example of a second language is Italian for native speakers of Slovene in the bilingual area of the Slovenian Istria. However, as our society is becoming ever more multicultural and multilingual, it is often difficult to establish the difference between 'foreign' and 'second language', such as is often the case in bilingual areas in which a foreign language (more often than not English) becomes more widespread than the second language. Another term, 'additional language', is used to refer to any language other than a person's mother tongue, especially in order to reflect the fact that many people learn more than one language other than their own, such as Slovene pupils in the Littoral who learn Italian as a second language, English as the first foreign language and, for example, German as the second foreign language. The advantage of using the term 'additional language' is especially in the fact that it refers to all the languages learnt beside one's native language with the same expression and therefore avoids the division into more or less important languages (Pižorn, 2009). In our book, the term 'foreign language' (FL) is mostly used as it corresponds with the school subject taught in school. In addition, while the focus is clearly on English as a foreign language (EFL), we believe that the principles and strategies presented are applicable and relevant also for teaching other languages.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One first presents the key approaches which have shaped the field of teaching English and other foreign

languages at the primary level by focusing on the importance of different language acquisition and learning theories for FL teaching. We then look at different approaches and methods which have been developed and used over the last century, with a special emphasis on those relevant for teaching English at the primary level. One of the approaches, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), is discussed separately in the third chapter. The decision to dedicate a complete chapter to CLIL was made based on the belief that it is an approach which offers great potential for teaching young language learners (YLLs) and which successfully integrates other approaches and concepts.

Part Two focuses on language skills and competences and consists of eight chapters. The first two give an outline of effective methods and strategies for developing the four language skills, while literacy development is discussed in a separate chapter. The fourth chapter, 'Focus on Vocabulary and Grammar,' deliberately examines the areas of grammar and vocabulary together, arguing in favour of using a holistic approach to teaching these two areas of language. The next two chapters, 'Materials and Resources,' 'Lesson Planning' and 'Inside the Classroom and Classroom Language' investigate several practical aspects of teaching a foreign language, from evaluating course-books to different aspects of lesson planning and classroom management. The last chapter in this part is dedicated to online learning. The decision to include a whole chapter to teaching a foreign language online reflects the time in which the book has been written. Although the text is the result of several years of studying, teaching, observing, (self)reflecting, trying and testing concepts and strategies in the area of teaching YLLs, several chapters were added in 2020 and 2021, the years of the coronavirus pandemic and a time which will go down in history as the great expansion of digital education.

Part Three outlines the most important aspects and basic principles of assessing young language learners and discusses different types of assessment, such as the difference between knowledge and performance assessment. We have argued that the assessment of YLs' needs to be conducted with caution, always bearing in mind the learners' age, their cognitive, motor, linguistic, emotional and social development. While separate chapters are dedicated to the assessment of individual language skills, we have also pointed out that the YLs' classroom is characterised by more attention on oral skills (listening and speaking) at the beginning, with reading and writing being incorporated slowly and gradually. Finally, we have laid out the benefits and potential of using formative assessment and assessment for learning in the YLs' classroom.

The book comes with several features which are aimed at providing clarity and direction to the reader. An important feature of the book are different sections or capsules at different points in the text. The 'Chapter Objectives' box gives an overview of the most important topics and concepts discussed, the 'Reflection Point' capsule is aimed at providing readers with a guide to the most relevant issues in particular areas, while the section 'Classroom Insights' looks at several classroom examples collected by the authors during classroom observations or from discussions with pre-service and in-service teachers. Finally, the 'Key Takeaways' section summarises the key concepts and most important messages of individual chapters, while for a more comprehensive insight into various issues discussed, readers should check the 'Further Reading' section at the end of each chapter. We hope *Teaching English at Primary Level: From Theory into the Classroom* will help you navigate your way through understanding the complexity of teaching primary language learners and provide valuable support in one of the most rewarding and challenging professions.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that individual chapters were written by separate authors. Silva Bratož is the author of Chapters 1–3, 7–11 and 14, Mihaela Brumen of Chapters 3 and 11, Mateja Dagarin Fojkar of Chapters 5 and 6, and Karmen Pižorn of Chapters 12 and 13. However, it is also important to note that in the process of writing the book, we all worked as a cohesive and collaborative team, providing ideas and invaluable feedback to each other.

Silva Bratož