

Chapter 1 Children learning English

Children as language learners



The child in the example here¹ speaks English as his first language. But we can tell that he is still learning by the errors in his speech. By about four and a half years of age, however, he will have acquired the basic grammar system needed for everyday communication, though there will be some more complex aspects of grammar, eg sentence connectors, which he will only finally acquire in his teens. Children learning English as a foreign language also make errors which can be seen as a sign of active learning. These errors give us evidence that both first and second language children are not just imitating what they hear like parrots, but are working out how the language system operates. The errors give us windows to look through and see what they have discovered about language so far.

But there is one important difference between children learning their first language and children learning a second language at school: second language children have already learned one language. So they bring with them to the language classroom a great deal of experience of language, of life and many other natural

abilities which help them to learn and to learn English. As teachers, we need to make use of and build on these abilities and characteristics. In this chapter, we will consider:

- 1 Contexts for learning English
- 2 Children as language learners
- 3 How teachers' beliefs about learning affect their teaching
- 4 Ways of observing children's language learning

The aim of this chapter is to help you to reflect on your own teaching so that you can consider to what extent you take account of the ways in which children learn and learn languages.

1 Contexts for learning English

Many teachers I have talked to believe that the ideal situation for children learning a second language is to live in the country where the language is spoken, to be surrounded by it and to acquire it naturally through using it every day.

If we analyse this suggestion, we can identify a number of different conditions which are associated with this ideal learning situation:

- *Time*
Children will have plenty of time for learning English and it can be spread over several years.
- *Exposure*
They are exposed to English all around them, both in and outside of school.
- *A real need for English*
They have a need to use English in order to survive on a daily basis, eg to make friends, to study in school, to shop, to travel, etc.
- *Variety of input*
They are exposed to a wide variety of uses of English, eg spoken and written, English for thinking, for interacting, for getting things done, for imagining.

- *Meaningful input*

They will receive plenty of meaningful language input through experience of English not as a subject to be learned, but as a means of communication, where the focus is on the meaning not the form of the language.

Task 1 Comparing situations

Here are three different situations for learning English. Which situation is closest to the one in which you teach?

Junko is an eight-year-old Japanese girl. Her parents are working in England. She attends a Japanese school. After one year, she has picked up quite a lot of English from the au pair girl who works for the family and from the children who live next door. She can chat away quite happily with other children and she often translates for her mother when they go shopping to the market. Her mother finds it difficult to speak English.

Rosa is an eight-year-old girl who lives in Colombia in South America. She learns English at school. She does not hear or use any English outside school. She is not sure why she is learning English, except that her parents think it is important. At the end of one year of English, she knows a few words of English.

Dorji is an eight-year-old boy from Bhutan in the Himalayas. He is in Class 2 and he is learning all his subjects through English. Outside school, he will see some shop signs in English and he may watch English films at home on his video with his parents. By the end of two years, he already knows a lot of English and can use it to communicate with his teachers, who speak to him in English.

- Compare the three situations and tick the chart to show which points in the left column apply to each learning situation.
- Which situation do you think is the most favourable for language learning for young learners and why?
- Which situation is the least favourable and why? Can you identify three ways in which it could be made into a more favourable environment?

Situation A (Junko) Situation B (Rosa) Situation C (Dorji)

Plenty of time for English			
Exposure to English inside/outside school			
Need to use English			
Exposure to a variety of different uses of English			
Meaningful input – focus on meaning and communication			

Commentary ■ ■ ■

These three situations represent different opportunities for learning English. Situations A and C seem the most favourable for learning English because they allow more exposure to English and more opportunities for using it.

Compared to situations A and C, situation B offers:

- a limited amount of time spent on English
- no need or reason for using English
- a formal learning environment with the focus mainly on correctness
- a limited and controlled language input.

However a great many children learn English successfully in school contexts like B. So we need to consider the best way of making the classroom a positive learning environment. Our role as the teacher is likely to be very important in doing this.

Here are some suggestions for how to create a more favourable environment in the classroom. Which ones can you use in your classroom? What other ideas do you have?

- Make your classroom a lively place through the use of attractive wall displays, displays of pupils' work, a book corner, etc.
- Motivate pupils to want to learn English by using interesting and enjoyable learning activities, eg project work, games, drama.
- Create a warm and happy atmosphere where teacher and pupils enjoy working together.
- Help pupils to develop personal reasons for learning English, for example by encouraging out-of-school class activities, eg pen friends, projects, reading story books.

In order to be able to create the right conditions for language learning in your classroom, you need to develop an awareness of how children learn foreign languages. You may already have many ideas gained from your own experience, from your reading or from training. It may be helpful to re-examine these ideas in order to develop your teaching further. ■

2 Children as language learners

In this section we will consider some of the natural abilities and characteristics children possess which help them to learn a foreign language. We will begin by examining teachers' beliefs about how children learn languages.

Task 2 Examining teachers' beliefs about how children learn languages

- How do you think children learn a foreign language?
- How far do you agree with the views below?

Children learn a foreign language ...

'... in a natural way, the same way they learn their own language.'

'... through being motivated. It depends on the teacher's style. If the teacher motivated them they would learn fast or quicker.'

'... by listening and repeating.'

'... by imitating the teacher. They want to please the teacher. They feel embarrassed when they make mistakes.'

'... by doing and interacting with each other in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance, through a variety of interesting and fun activities for which they see the purpose.'

'... through translating sentences into their own language.'

Quotes from teachers attending an international summer school

The following examples are taken from real classrooms or teaching situations around the world, in both foreign and second language learning contexts. As you read and work through them, consider whether they support or conflict with your views.

Teacher is indicated by the letter T, Pupils are indicated by Pps and individual pupils by P1, P2, etc.

Example 1 Using language creatively

The example below shows how pupils' language can give important clues about how they learn languages.

A class of Bhutanese children (Year 3) has just prepared a set of simple written instructions (*Read and draw*) and tried them out with some younger children. Here is an example of the instructions which one pupil produced.

Draw three nice flowers.
Draw a flower on the ground.
Draw nine leaves round the flower.

The younger children (Year 2) had to read the instructions and draw. The teacher is now having a discussion with the Year 3 pupils to evaluate how successful the younger children were and what problems they had in doing the *Read and draw* activity.

T What's the problem?

P They [Year 2 children] do not know how to write [the child means *draw*] leaves. They are writing on the ground.

T Where did you ask them to draw the leaves?

P In the flower's stick. [The child means the stem of the flower.]

T Oh yes, that's right. (*smiles*)

Task 3

- Do you think the pupil has been taught the phrase 'the flower's stick'? If not, where has it come from?
- What does this example tell us about how children learn English?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

This example shows a child using language creatively. She is using a phrase she has not heard or been taught before. She has made up the phrase *flower's stick* to express her own meaning by using previously learned language (*flower* and *stick*), but recombining it in a new and creative way. It shows that she already has knowledge of the language system, eg that we show possession through using apostrophe + s. She is *trying out* her knowledge by using it to express her message.

This example shows us that pupils actively try to experiment and work out the rules of the language in their heads, though they may not be aware of doing this. The activity which the pupils carried out in this classroom and the discussion afterwards allowed them the freedom to be creative and go beyond what they had learned. For example, the teacher's question *What's the problem?* invited pupils to say what they felt. When the pupil spoke, the teacher showed interest (*Where did you ask them to draw the leaves?*) and was supportive (*Oh yes, that's right*). So the pupils felt confident enough to try to use the rules of the language they already knew to experiment. This is also a nice example of how a classroom can provide opportunities to use English in more varied ways (a pupil explaining and commenting) and create a real need for children to use the language.

One implication of this example is that children need opportunities to try out and experiment with language, but they also need feedback to confirm or modify their hypotheses. ■

Example 2 Going for meaning

Children are able to draw on many of the abilities which they have made use of in learning their first language. One of these is the ability to make sense of what is happening in a situation.

In this example, the (ten-year-old) pupil is looking at a picture of a man who is sleeping. Two men are trying to steal his drum. The teacher is asking him questions about the picture.

- ¹ P The man is sleeping.
T And then?
P The mango is fell down.
T Then?
⁵ P Two men is taking his drum.
T Two ...
P Two men is taking his drum.
T You say *two men* ... (*stresses the words 'two men'*)
P Two meen men ... (*tries changing the pronunciation*)
¹⁰ T No. (*The pupil still does not provide the answer the teacher wants.*)
P ... is taking his drum.
T Again, do you say *is*?
P Two men are taking his drum. (*The pupil finally realizes that the teacher is concerned about subject/verb agreement.*)

Task 4

- There is a breakdown in communication between the pupil and teacher from line 6 onwards. What is the reason for it?
- What does the example tell you about how pupils learn a foreign language?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The pupil is trying to explain what is happening in the picture, whereas the teacher is concerned for the pupil to get the grammar right. The pupil focuses on the meaning, while the teacher is concerned with the form of the sentences. Finally the pupil realizes what the teacher wants.

This example shows that children have a good instinct for interpreting the *sense or meaning of a situation*. They do this through using their knowledge of everyday life and the clues provided by the situation, or the picture, as in this example. They work out the meaning first and tend not to pay attention to the words that are used to express the meaning. As children get older, they begin to pay more attention to the words. This ability to *go for meaning* is a very useful one in language learning as it allows children to work out what is happening in a situation, eg a story, a video, a conversation, and this then helps them to attach meaning to the words used. The use of communication games, drama, project work, story telling and practical activities in teaching, all allow children to make use of this ability to go for meaning. However, teachers need to respond initially in ways which build on children's natural instinct for meaning, and not ignore it as in this example. Accuracy is, of course, important, but it can be dealt with later once children are familiar with the meaning. ■

Example 3 Using 'chunks' of language

Children use a variety of strategies to learn a foreign language. This example, recorded by Linda Ventriglia² with two Spanish-speaking children who are learning English in America, shows how children make use of ready-made phrases of language.

The children find a group of wooden blocks which are lying in a cardboard box.

Miguel: Vamos a hacer un tren fantastico con estos bloques.

(Let's make a pretend train with these blocks.)

Pon el mas grande aqui.

(Put the biggest one here.)

Maria: Pero necesitaremos mas bloques grandes. No podremos hacerlo con los pequeños.

(But we will need more large blocks. We will not be able to make it with the small ones.)

Miguel: Claro que si. We have the technology.

(Yes, we can.)

Task 5

- Notice the phrase the pupil says in English. Where did he learn it? Is he using it appropriately?
- Have your pupils used any whole phrases or sayings like this? How can using whole phrases help children's language learning?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The conversation is entirely in Spanish until the last sentence, which is said in English: *We have the technology*. The pupil has possibly heard the phrase in school or on TV and picked it up as a complete phrase (chunk) or formula learned as a whole. He uses it appropriately for the situation.

Children learning a foreign language often use complete phrases of language they have picked up from someone else, eg *I don't know, Knock it off, Come on, Goodbye*. These are sometimes called chunks of language because they are learned and used in speech as whole phrases. Children may not have been taught these chunks formally, but they help them to communicate when they have very little language. Later they may begin to break down these phrases and recombine the words in new ways. For example, in the beginning a child may just use the phrase *I don't know*. Later he/she may begin to realize that this can be combined with other bits of language, eg *I don't know his name, I don't know spelling*. Later he/she may begin to change other parts of the phrase, eg *We don't know, They don't know* and at a later stage he/she may begin to realize that the verb changes according to the subject, eg *He doesn't know*. It is useful to observe when children begin to break down a phrase in this way as this is a sign of language development. We can help to encourage this by getting children to notice common or recurring elements in phrases. ■

Teaching children chunks may be very helpful in the early stages of language learning to enable them to take part in conversations. They can *take over* and use for themselves ready-made bits of language so that they can join in. By joining in, they get more exposure to input for language learning and more practice. The use of songs, rhymes, poems, drama and classroom routines all help to give children access to ready-made bits of language so they can begin to communicate.

Example 4 Having fun

Children have a great capacity to enjoy themselves. When they are enjoying themselves, they are usually absorbed by the activity and want to continue with it. They are not always aware that they are learning language.

In this example, children in their first year of learning English (six to seven-year-olds) in Croatia³ are playing a game with their teacher. They have obviously played it before.

T Let's start. Oh what's that up there in the sky? (*sounds surprised*) Oh my goodness, you know I can see seven helicopters in the sky.

Pps No, no. Yes. Yes ... No... (*pupils laugh disbelievingly*)

T You don't believe me. Have a look there. (*gives one pupil a pair of binoculars*)

Pps What can you see?

P I can see three monkeys. (*sounds very surprised*)

Pps No, no you can't. (*smiling*)

P Have a look. (*gives binoculars to another child*)

Pps What can you see?

P I can see a spaceship in the sky.

Pps No, no, you can't. Yes? (*sound disbelieving*)

Task 6

- What activity are the children involved in?
- Do you think they are enjoying themselves? How do you know?
- How do you think this will affect their language learning?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The class in Croatia is playing a chain game which involves imagining you can see something interesting or unusual in the sky when you look through the binoculars. The rest of the pupils have to express disbelief. This leads to the pupil who made the claim inviting someone to check for themselves and so the game continues. It allows pupils the opportunity to use their imagination fully.

They seem to be really enjoying themselves and entering fully into the spirit of the ritual exchange between the person who makes a claim and the rest of the class who express disbelief. The pupils are laughing and seem keen to take part even though they have obviously played the game before.

If pupils enjoy the learning activities, they will be more involved and this may increase their desire to continue. This is very positive for language learning, because if children want to continue with an activity for some time, it will give them more exposure to language input and more chance to practise the language. They will also develop more positive attitudes towards English as they will associate it with something enjoyable and pleasing. The game also involves the use of language patterns, eg *I can see a ...*, which assists the building up of their underlying language system. ■

Example 5 Joining in the action

Children are naturally curious and active. They eagerly explore their environment and interact with people, which helps them to construct their understanding of the world they live in. An important way in which they do this is through physical activity and experiencing things at first hand. Let's see how this helps them in learning a foreign language.

In this example, a teacher from Croatia³ has been doing an action rhyme with (six to seven-year-old) children involving their fingers (*Put your finger on your toes, etc.*). Children have enjoyed this and have even requested her to do it again. Now she has invited children to come out and give instructions to their friends. They listen and then carry out the instructions.

- P1** Put your finger on your hand. (*The last word was not clear and some children are not clear where to put their finger.*)
- T** Well, once again you have to be precise. Where do you put ... where do you want them to put ...
- P1** Put your finger on your hand. (*stresses the word 'hand' and pupils put their fingers on their hands*)
- T** (*asks pupils*) Where is your hand?
All right.
- P1** Put your finger on your neck. (*pupils obey*)
Put your finger on your knee.
- T** OK that was very good. Next? (*another child volunteers*)
- P2** Put your finger on your nose.
Put your fingers on your head.

Task 7

- How is the language linked to the physical activity?
- Why is this type of activity (action game) likely to be very helpful for language learning?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

In the first part of the lesson, the teacher and children did the actions together as they said the words. So the actions helped to make the meaning of the words clear. In the later *listen and do* activity, pupils listened to the instructions as their classmates told them what to do and then demonstrated their understanding of it through a physical action.

Physical activities, eg making things, action songs, games, rhymes and drama provide excellent contexts for language learning. The language is closely related to what is happening in the situation, and so children can get clues about the meaning from the activity which accompanies the language. *They learn through doing*. There is also a clear and meaningful purpose for them in using the language. The *listen and do* activities are particularly useful for beginners, as children's listening abilities may be far ahead of their speaking abilities. This type of activity allows pupils to be actively learning and participating, but does not force them to speak or produce language till they are ready. It provides them with exposure to meaningful input. ■

Example 6 Talking their heads off

If we watch children speaking in their first language, we notice how much they enjoy talking. If you visit a primary school, children quickly come up to talk to you and will ask you questions and tell you about themselves without any prompting. What happens to this desire to communicate when children learn another language?

In this example, Ram is introducing (six to seven-year-old) pupils in their first year of learning English to the concepts *same* and *different*. He has placed a pile of objects in the middle of the room, eg bottle tops, match boxes, fir cones, etc and the children are sitting round in a big circle.

- T** Give me two that are the same. (*pupil looks at the pile of objects*) Give me two the same: matching ... (*pupil picks up two bottle tops*)
Very good, very good, boy. (*teacher pats pupil on the shoulder*)
Right.
- Pps** (*clap loudly*)
- T** Very good, boy. Go now. (*sends him back to his place and chooses another pupil called Gembo*)
- Pps** Yes, yes, Gembo. (*pupils agree with teacher's choice*)

- T** Now you go and give me two different ... different things.
P Gembo Dorji (*says pupil's name, possibly to help teacher who is new and does not know all the names*)
Pps Different ... (*pupils try to prompt Gembo*)
G Different ...
Pps No. (*Gembo picks up two similar objects and pupils tell him that he is wrong*)
Pps Different – no. (*pupils tell teacher that the objects are not different*)

Task 8

- Do the children in the example above show any desire to communicate in English?
- Is there likely to be any difference between age groups (eg between six to eight-year-olds and 12 to 14-year-olds) in their desire to communicate?
- How will children's desire to communicate help them to learn a foreign language?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The pupils show a lot of eagerness to participate and express their ideas even though, as near beginners, they have very limited language. They use the limited phrases they have to communicate, eg *Different – no*.

Children are likely to vary considerably even among the same age group, with some children being much quieter than others. In general, younger children (five to ten-year-olds) tend to be more enthusiastic and willing to talk in class than older children. As children reach puberty, they get more embarrassed about talking in front of others. Peer approval becomes very important and they are very concerned not to make a fool of themselves publicly.

Children's desire to communicate is very powerful and this carries over into foreign language learning. If they are engaged in an interesting activity, they will *talk their heads off* happily. This is very useful for language learning because it means that pupils will get plenty of practice in using the language. This may be one reason why in natural situations, children often seem to do better than adults, ie their strong desire to communicate means that they immediately try to use the new language and so get more practice. Adults usually want to study it formally in classrooms first. We need to think how to activate this desire in the foreign language classroom through the teaching methods and resources we use. ■

Example 7 Feeling at home

Friday 31st march

Mrs

I feel better when Mrs
 B says alright then
 who can help Rowan. *their*
 Then people put up thier
 hands and tell me the
 answer I can understand
 alot more than I could
 before I came to this
 school. That is a way that
 helps me. Another thing
 that helps is once some-
 body ~~lets~~ tells me the
 answer I keep on saying
 it in my head

We should not underestimate pupils' feelings. If they are happy and secure, they are more likely to enjoy and benefit from their language learning⁴. This example is taken from a diary written by a nine-year-old British child who has been learning French as a foreign language for a year.

Task 9

- How does the pupil feel about learning French?
- What support does he receive from the teacher and pupils?
- What effect does this have on him?
- What can we learn from this example about pupils' feelings and the way this affects language learning?

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The pupil does not seem very confident about his own abilities.

The teacher is aware of his need for support and asks other pupils to help.

The support he receives makes him feel more confident and secure. As a result, he feels that he has made some progress since he came to the school.

This example shows that pupils have feelings about language learning. They often feel quite frightened, embarrassed or insecure about learning a new language. In this case, the teacher has understood the pupil's need for support, and this has helped him to gain confidence. As teachers, we need to be very sensitive to pupils' feelings as this may affect their motivation and attitude to learning the language. If they feel *at home* in the classroom, they are more likely to participate and take risks. ■

The examples above may have confirmed your own experience or may have raised questions that you want to explore further. We have seen that children do not learn just in one way. The points made by teachers on page 3 represent many different ways in which children learn, not just by repeating or imitating or translating.

Here is a summary of some of the important abilities which our pupils are able to make use of in learning a foreign language and which indicate the active nature of their learning.

USING LANGUAGE CREATIVELY

JOINING IN THE ACTION

GOING FOR MEANING

TALKING THEIR HEADS OFF

USING 'CHUNKS' OF LANGUAGE

FEELING AT HOME

HAVING FUN

Creating conditions which support language learning

Children will only be able to make use of these abilities if we create the right kind of learning environment in which they can draw on them. This means we need to consider how to:

- create a real need and desire to use English
- provide sufficient time for English
- provide exposure to varied and meaningful input with a focus on communication
- provide opportunities for children to experiment with their new language
- provide plenty of opportunities to practise and use the language in different contexts
- create a friendly atmosphere in which children can take risks and enjoy their learning
- provide feedback on learning
- help children notice the underlying pattern in language.

3 How teachers' beliefs about learning affect their teaching

Often we are not aware of our own beliefs until we hear someone express an opinion which we agree with or disagree with. We may not be aware of how our beliefs affect the way we respond to other people or the way we do our work or the way we teach. For example, I recently talked to some primary teachers in Bangladesh. They felt that it was very difficult for young children to learn English at primary level. So they used translation as their main teaching method to make things easier for children. They could not imagine how a pupil could learn without translation.

Let us look at some examples of how teachers' views about learning may affect the way they teach.

Task 10 How beliefs affect teaching

Here are outlines of two lessons on prepositions for eight to nine-year-old children.

- How does Teacher A think pupils learn language?
- How does Teacher B think pupils learn language?
- Which lesson provides most opportunities for pupils to make use of the natural abilities and characteristics which they bring to language learning?

TEACHER A

1 Presentation

The teacher presents each preposition through showing a concrete example and then modelling the sentence, eg

The ruler is in the box.

The ruler is under the table.

The ruler is on the table.

Ruslan is standing near the table.

2 Whole class repetition

Pupils repeat the sentence after the teacher several times.

3 Group drill

The teacher points to objects in different locations and gets groups to describe them in chorus, eg

T Group C, where is the ruler? (*puts it under the table*)

C The ruler is under the table.

T Group B, where is the ruler?

B The ruler is under the table.

T Where is the ruler? (*puts it on the table*)

TEACHER B

1 Warm-up game/revision

The teacher calls out six children (in pairs) to the front of the class to carry out some instructions, eg *Stand in front of your partner. Stand behind your partner*, etc. The rest of the class have to guess which pair will be fastest in following the instructions.

2 Dialogue

The teacher draws pictures of two girls and builds up a dialogue on the blackboard with the pupils' help. One of the girls has to draw a plan of a classroom for homework and needs help from her friend to find out where pupils are sitting. With the pupils' help, the teacher elicits questions and answers, eg *Where is Asna sitting? She is sitting on the left of Aishah*. Pupils practise the dialogue in pairs.

3 Communication game

Pupils work in pairs to fill in the missing names of children on a picture of a birthday party. There are two versions of the picture so Pupil A has names that Pupil B does not have and vice versa.

Commentary ■ ■ ■

The way teachers plan and organize their lessons reflects their beliefs about teaching and learning. It gives some idea about what the teacher thinks is the most appropriate way to help pupils to learn.

Teacher A seems to believe that:

- pupils need to understand the meaning of new language, and so, for example, she demonstrates as she introduces the new language
- pupils need a lot of repetition in order to learn
- pupils' language needs to be controlled so that mistakes are reduced
- pupils should not be exposed to language that they have not been formally taught
- pupils may not have enough language to work together in pairs or groups independently of the teacher
- the teacher provides the main source of language input.

Teacher B seems to believe that:

- pupils need to understand the meaning of new language
- pupils need a variety of activities
- pupils need activities which are enjoyable and stimulating
- pupils learn through using the language more freely for a communicative purpose
- pupils benefit from being actively involved
- pupils benefit from practising together independently of the teacher.

Although there are many apparent differences between the teachers, there are also some similarities. They both seem to believe that ...

- pupils need plenty of practice
- pupils need to understand the meaning of what they are learning
- focusing formally on the rules of grammar would not be appropriate for children.

Although both lessons provide opportunities for language learning, Teacher B's lesson seems to provide more opportunities for pupils to make use of the abilities which they bring with them to the language classroom. For example, the games will appeal to their sense of fun and arouse their interest. The communication game gives them a real purpose for using language and provides opportunities for them to use language more freely and to experiment. Pupils' desire to talk is also catered for in the dialogue activity and the communication game. In general, Teacher B's lesson gives more opportunity for children to try out their language. However Teacher A's lesson does highlight the importance of repetition in learning. Children need opportunities for repetition, but it needs to be done in an interesting and meaningful way. Mechanical repetition, eg as in the chorus drills in Teacher A's lesson, where children do not need to pay attention to the meaning, has limited value for language learning.

Of course, it is difficult to know in reality which teacher's class would be most effective for language learning. It would depend on how they were carried out, as both lessons can be well or badly done. It may be that the teacher's relationship with his/her pupils is more important in the end than the particular teaching method used. And this brings us back to beliefs again, for our beliefs about learning and teaching will affect the kind of relationships we build with pupils. ■

4 Ways of observing children's language learning

Task 10 has shown that our beliefs about learning can affect the way we plan our teaching and the way we respond to young learners. If you want to develop your teaching further, you need to become aware of the beliefs which influence your teaching. Development is only possible if you can become aware of these beliefs by trying to articulate them to yourself or to others.

Maybe like Teacher A above, you believe that pupils' language should be carefully controlled. *Why do you believe that? What would happen if you gave your pupils some freer activities occasionally? How would it affect pupils?* To answer those questions, you need to think about the reasons for what you do and to think about how and why pupils respond in the way they do by observing them closely. If you become better at watching and learning from pupils and relate what you learn to your beliefs, you will have a good basis for developing your own ideas about teaching and learning. Here are some ideas:

MONDAY 21

Class 2

Lily made a joke today when we were playing the game **Simon says**. I told everyone to stand up & David didn't want to. So Lily said jokingly 'he's grandfather'.

Really interesting to see that children can joke even using limited English. Must listen out for other examples. Maybe they could try and write jokes in English.

1 Keep a diary

Keep a diary or observation note book and start to write down interesting things you observe children say or do. You can then use this information in planning future lessons or providing specific help for individuals.

2 Tape record children's pair or group interaction

Tape record a pair or group of children doing a particular language-learning activity. Focus on some particular aspect of the activity, eg the way they work together and interact to do the activity. Use the recording to consider how successfully the children were interacting to do the task.

Here is an example recorded by Rod Ellis⁵ of two children learning English in the UK. P1 is holding a picture and giving instructions to P2 how to draw it. P2 cannot see the drawing.

- P1 Draw big red circle.
P2 Big red circle. (*pupil draws as instructed*)
P1 And a small blue circle.
P2 In here? (*pupil indicates circle he has already drawn*)
P1 I don't know. (*pupil is not sure how to explain*)
P2 A big?
P1 I don't know. A square in a circle.
P2 Big or small?

When we examine the dialogue we see that the children manage some level of communication mainly because P2 takes charge. P2, with a limited amount of English, is skilful at supporting P1's attempts to give instructions. He confirms what has been said in line 2, asks questions of clarification in line 4, tries to prompt in line 6, asks for clarification in line 8. These strategies provide more opportunities for P2 to use his English. They also support P1's initial attempts to communicate by structuring the interaction and giving prompts of the kind of information needed.

The recording suggests that P1 may need additional language input and practice to build up the language required for giving instructions. It also shows that strategies for managing the interaction, as P2 demonstrates, are an important help in communication. So it may be useful to spend time on raising children's awareness about these strategies and demonstrating how to use them.

Summary

In this chapter, you have considered:

- *the different contexts in which children can learn English* and how these affect the quantity and quality of language input which children get. In a foreign language situation, children will depend almost entirely on the school environment for input. So you, as their teacher, may be the only source of language, which makes your role in children's language learning very important.
- *the variety of ways in which children learn* and the natural abilities and characteristics children make use of in learning another language, eg the desire to communicate, the ability to work out the meaning, creativity, the need for security, etc. Children do not learn in just one way, but use all the different ways mentioned by teachers. However children can only make use of these means if you develop the right kind of learning environment – one in which they have plenty of exposure to a variety of meaningful input, feel free to take risks and experiment, want to use the language to communicate with you and other class mates and get feedback on their learning.
- *how teachers' beliefs about teaching affect the way they teach.* The way you create the conditions for learning through your planning, your management and your responses to pupils is determined by your beliefs and assumptions. So if you want to be responsive to what you learn from observing and working with your pupils, you need to examine those beliefs constantly and be prepared to change them if necessary.
- *some ideas for observing children* which may help you to become better at watching and understanding their learning. You can use the information you gain from observing to examine your own beliefs and classroom practice so that the actions you take are based on beliefs supported by evidence from children's learning. You can make use of this information to plan more effectively for children's future learning.

One of the implications from the discussion in this chapter is that children learning a second or foreign language will use similar processes. However a key difference lies in the type and amount of language exposure. In a second language situation, children gain input both from inside and outside school. They are not totally dependent on the school environment. But in a foreign language situation, they depend almost entirely on the school for input. That puts you in a powerful position to make their learning of English a positive, stimulating and successful experience. In the rest of the book, we will explore how this can be achieved.

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