




Getting Young Learners to Speak English from the Start: Examples for Teaching Practice

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Abstract

One focus of early foreign language learning in the primary EFL classroom is the development of oral skills. Imitative and reproductive speaking activities can provide opportunities for the development of basic speaking competencies and fluency. Speaking practice aims at progressing the acquisition of the target language and helping children to become communicatively competent speakers of English. Using classroom management as a basis, this contribution suggests practical examples aimed at enabling and equipping young learners to speak English from the start.

Keywords: TEYL, classroom management, speaking practice, pronunciation training, dialogue practice

1. Teaching Speaking to Young Learners

Foreign language learning with young learners builds on a trustful teacher-student relationship, a non-restrictive learning atmosphere free from fear and characterized by constructive feedback, the quality of speech (the teacher as a role model), and enough room for integrated practice and individual development. In general, young learners tend to have great trust in their primary school teachers and rely on their speaking competence as their role models. In most publications, the expression *young learners* is applied to children from the age of three to twelve. This contribution focuses on the skill of speaking in TEFL to young learners from the ages of 6 to 10 in a classroom setting, as in most German federal states teaching English to young learners (TEYL) starts in grade 3 at the age of eight or nine. In Germany, educational as well as curricular decisions are made by the federal states. Therefore, only six federal states already start early in class 1 (5/6-year-olds) (Hempel et al., 2017). When starting learning English in the school setting at the age of 6 or 8 (in 1st

or 3rd grade), children are already equipped with a variety of qualities that will help them learn a foreign language: Their joy of learning and ability to imitate, their willingness to speak, as well as their little fear of making mistakes (Böttger, 2020). With high motivation and their childlike openness to new things, they easily overcome the fear of the unknown and make use of their natural ability to play with sounds and words (Kirkgöz, 2019).

Speaking in a foreign language is a complicated, multidimensional skill in which many sub-processes take place in parallel. Being able to communicate successfully in everyday foreign-language situations, to adapt one's language to the respective conversational situation and special contexts, requires a competent interplay of the language components. (Böttger, 2016, p. 131). As Böttger rightly states, when starting their journey to acquire a foreign language, the components pronunciation, intonation, and learning basic vocabulary play a major role for young learners (Böttger, 2016). In the following paragraph, I will focus on the principles of early speaking practice and a holistic language teaching approach.

2. Principles of early speaking practice

An early start and a high exposure to the target language form important aspects of successful foreign language acquisition with young learners. In line with their age-specific characteristics and needs, the most important principles in TEYL are raising curiosity, learning without restrictions, promoting individuality, applicability to the learners' lives (*Lebensweltbezug*), and providing enriching task formats (Böttger, 2016, p. 150). Task formats demanding and promoting musical/motoric skills, problem-solving, and stimulating multiple sensory channels form an integral part of TEYL. Integrated repetition and practice play a key role not only in the primary EFL classroom.

Equipping learners to use a foreign language for authentic communication in real-life situations is essential. As Cameron highlights, children should be enabled "to use the foreign language with real people for real purposes" (Cameron, 2001, p. 37). It is important to consider this

social aspect of foreign language learning. Meaningful communication that involves relevant and age-appropriate topics can help structure the language acquisition process. New words should always be linked to existing language knowledge and presented in useable chunks, sentences, and/or dialogue structures. To use and further develop the heterogeneous skill levels brought in by the young learners, a learning atmosphere free of restrictions and the constructive handling of mistakes is necessary.

Cameron emphasizes two guiding principles for TEYL: “Meaning must come first” – children need to understand the spoken language to learn it and “to learn discourse skills, children need both to participate in discourse and to build up knowledge and skills for participation” (Cameron, 2001, p. 36). The target of teaching should be discourse as situational language use to enable the children to speak about relevant content in real conversational situations. Discourse happens whenever teachers and learners interact during tasks and activities in (language) classrooms. Teachers need to be aware that their young learners may sometimes continue with activities or tasks even if they do not understand what is being said because they want to please their teachers and respect them. Young learners need repeated listening to models of language use, especially by native or proficient speakers. Language input through listening can be provided by audio or video recordings and/or in-person visits from native speakers in addition to their language teachers. Furthermore, they should be provided with a variety of opportunities to say the words and chunks in different scenarios and get constant feedback to improve their fluency and accuracy (Cameron, 2001).

2.1 Songs in early English learning

Songs offer a great way to practice the young learners’ pronunciation, listening skills, vocabulary, as well as sentence structure, and form an integral part of TEYL. As Kirkgöz notes, “[s]ongs help children gradually internalise the structures and patterns of the foreign language and to learn specific vocabulary” (Kirkgöz, 2019, p. 182). In a review of nine empirical classroom studies the pedagogical value of songs and their positive effect on receptive and productive vocabulary development, motivation, pronunciation, communicative abilities and literacy is shown (Davis,

2017, p. 452). When teaching songs, the use of illustrations and gestures seems to be enhancing learning and memorizing foreign language words and phrases as well (Macedonia, 2014). In a typical children's song, phrases are short and use simple conversational language helping young learners to process the language easily (Murphy, 2014). For children, rhymes, raps, and songs can be fun, highly motivational, and help them especially with the acquisition of new vocabulary and the internalisation of correct pronunciation and intonation patterns. The rhythm of a song, rap, or rhyme can support the acquisition of correct intonation patterns in English sentences and phrases. Correct intonation patterns of recurring basic sentences (e.g., "How are you?" ↑) can be practiced within a song to avoid the habituation of wrong patterns. Songs with an appropriate level of difficulty should be selected by the teacher as too much complexity discourages young learners to engage and sing along (Davis, 2017, p. 451). Together with lively discourse, and a native-like classroom language in the TEYL classroom, songs offer an age-appropriate and effective way of acquiring the language.

2.2 Classroom management in TEYL

Purposeful classroom management is of great significance as every English teacher faces organizational constraints such as the weekly amount of usually two English lessons with typically forty-five minutes each – a common structure of the German school system. Not teaching one's own class – as German primary school teachers normally do – and filling in as a subject teacher can complicate teacher-student relationships. Classroom management starts with "establishing and maintaining order in a classroom within an educational system that aims to foster learning as well as social and emotional growth" and "encompasses all of the teacher's practices related to developing mode of instruction (e.g., lecturing, group work) and dealing with learner behaviour" (Zein, 2019, p. 154). A close look at each learner encourages a holistic language teaching approach treating and analysing the student within the context of his or her system and background (Kirkgöz, 2019). Increased use of English in the primary school classroom opens opportunities for listening and elementary speaking. Teacher-fronted

language teaching followed by pair or group work allows the students to practice the new words in a protected space.

3. Speaking in the TEYL classroom

The basic precondition for developing speaking skills is to initially experience the foreign language through spoken language. According to Böttger, the conceptual order of the receptive, reproductive/imitative, and productive phase should be considered when acquiring a foreign language (Böttger, 2016). Speaking in a foreign language takes place at different levels: imitation, reproduction, and production. The first phase is characterised by memorisation through imitation: The learner pronounces and repeats sounds, words, phrases, sentences, even parts of texts. This poses a high demand on the learners' ability to memorise and pronounce new words which then must be retained and known by heart (Böttger, 2020). Steady pronunciation training in meaningful contexts builds the groundwork towards becoming competent speakers.

3.1 Pronunciation: Laying the foundation for speaking competence

Training the correct pronunciation of words and sounds and integrated repetition aims at enabling speakers to use the language freely. From the start, pronunciation practice should be introduced together with nonverbal instruction signs. These help the teacher to interact with students while placing focus on the pronunciation of the word. Whenever a new word, chunk, or phrase is integrated into EFL practices, a repeated phonologically correct presentation of the new word by the teacher forms the basis. Students must repeatedly see and hear how individual sounds are formed in the teacher's mouth. Table 1 illustrates examples on how to form and explain three of the typical English sounds and sound combinations to learners. Teachers could show similar illustrations (see Table 1) to learners and explain what they specifically have to do with their tongue and lips to form the sounds correctly by reading out the instructions. Feeling for the vibration of the vocal cords and inspect the outer appearance of the mouth with a hand mirror can help students to check if they engage the right articulatory organs in the right manner (see Böttger, 2006, for further ideas and applications).




<i>/dʒ/</i>	<i>/r/</i>	<i>/w/</i>
e.g. <i>German, jump, age</i>	e.g. <i>red, green, three</i>	e.g. <i>water, word, what</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The consonant <i>/dʒ/</i> is a voiced, alveo-palatal, affricate consonant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The consonant <i>/r/</i> is a voiced, palatal, liquid consonant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sound <i>/w/</i> is a voiced, bilabial glide.
		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lips are open and rounded. - The middle of the tongue is placed behind the upper teeth. - The tongue is quickly moved downward, and the air is forcefully pushed out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The tip of the tongue is moved upwards and backwards. - The tongue is curled slightly but does not touch the top of the mouth. - Air is breathed in and let out. - The vocal cords vibrate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lips form a tight circle, and the tongue is pulled back. - The tongue touches no other part of the mouth. - The lips are opened quickly while the tongue is moved forward, and air is pushed out of the mouth.

Table 1: Teaching typical sounds and sound combinations – */dʒ/*, */r/* and */w/* (based on Rogers, 2013)

A *silent period* follows the conscious presentation of the new word by the teacher that gives the students the time to process the exact sound and manner of articulation. During this 3-second period the teacher is counting down with three fingers nonverbally signed and forms the word again silently and in an exaggerated way. Thereafter, the students repeat the new word or chunk aloud chorally. The first rounds of repetition take place as teacher-fronted instruction so that every individual learner can see and hear the sound with precision before submerging in the following choral response. Variations like the game “*Like a ...*” (repeating the word like a robot, a witch, a grizzly bear, a princess, etc.) or “*Lip reading*”

(guessing the word just by reading the teacher's lips) create a diverse and multi-layered practice process. The class can then be split into different groups (e.g., window/door side, front/back, by rows/table groups, etc.) to repeat and practice pronunciation in smaller groups. To prevent individual mispronunciations and keep an eye on the individual, a few students can be asked to repeat alone by a nonverbal sign of the teacher (*repeat* = index fingers rotating around each other). Afterward, the training can continue in small groups or pair work to give room for supportive cooperation and constructive student feedback on each other. Intensive pronunciation practice can help to avoid *fossilizations* defined as the lasting incorrect memorization, and internalization of a word pronunciation extraordinarily difficult to relearn (Böttger, 2020, p. 98). Establishing reoccurring pronunciation routines and the repetition of familiar exercise formats as described fosters proper pronunciation and avoids future communication barriers through fossilization.

Intonation, emphasis, sound, and fluency are additional modules to be trained when dealing with chunks and sentences. The importance of message before accuracy does not take effect in this early oral production phase. Dangers of neglecting these aspects are wrong stress, intonation, and pronunciation of individual sounds becoming ingrained, or ultimately a wrong pronunciation being formed. The teacher must be familiar with the pronunciation and intonation of the new words and the right emphasis of sentences before introducing them in the EFL classroom. Careful preparation and practice beforehand is an important factor of effective TEYL. Against this background, the following section discusses how to initiate free speaking after repeated and ongoing imitation practice and the repetition of words, chunks, and sentences in communicative situations.

3.2 Speaking practice: Initiation of free speaking

As speaking can be learned first and foremost through the act of doing it, there should be consistent classroom management focusing on oral communication as a starting point (Böttger, 2016). Through motivating speaking situations and praising small steps, young learners can be encouraged to speak in the foreign language. The automatization of

correct speech habits as a predominantly mechanical process through imitation and repetition in age-appropriate settings forms the basis of free speaking: The transition of English language input from working memory to long-term memory succeeds well in the primary school years when something is methodically practiced and repeated in a varied and active way. If new vocabulary is in addition integrated into a larger linguistic context (e.g., a word in a whole sentence) and well-structured and organized in a larger thematic context, it is even better memorable. A meaningful documentation of thematic units preserves knowledge for later access, such as in the form of written word webs or self-made picture dictionaries. (Böttger, 2020, p. 24)

It is, therefore, necessary to not only orally present new words but also show the written word or sentence at a later point in the lesson. The written fixation helps with memorising and offers a great opportunity to talk about written vs. spoken English to foster language awareness. A well-managed booklet for new vocabulary supports the learning process and promotes method learning. Speaking whole sentences in a foreign language is no easy undertaking: Every aspect must be well aligned with the other. As Cameron notes “a speaker needs to find the most appropriate words and the correct grammar to convey meaning accurately and precisely, and needs to organise the discourse so that a listener will understand” (Cameron, 2001, p. 41). To master this challenge, students need to overcome their fear of failure and start speaking, being certain they are met with encouragement and praise. This achievement and courage is to be recognized and rewarded by the teacher to enable progress. Importantly, however, not every student is born a talker – some children need more time to get involved in actively speaking the foreign language. To respond to learners’ varied learning needs and language skills, the teacher can implement differentiated (proactive) instruction (Sullivan & Weeks, 2019). Differentiated instruction refers to an instructional design wherein “teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse individual needs to maximise the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 121). Differentiated instruction can be put into practice in numerous ways. For instance, teachers can allow variable response times and completion rates for

speaking tasks and thus recognise their students' diversity (Sullivan & Weeks, 2019). Smaller groups with similar needs can be formed and additional scaffolding can be provided in the form of pronunciation aids (e.g., individually recordable audio pens). In more heterogeneous groups, more advanced students can be good role models and function as assistant teachers. The more classmates get involved in actively participating in the lesson, the more oral communication in foreign language is cultivated and the easier it is for quiet students to follow their classmates' examples. The consequent use of English as classroom language is the most evident but also most effective parameter, as it gives children the opportunity to listen to and practice English as often as possible. Responding and asking in English should become natural in and in-between English lessons. Compared to listening, speaking demands much more of the young learners' language resources and skills. Therefore, speaking activities "require careful and plentiful support of various types, not just support for understanding, but also for production" (Cameron, 2001, p. 41).

4. Getting Young Learners to speak: Activities and methods

The following section focuses on how to get young learners to speak (freely) in the foreign language. I will present and explain activities and methods out of the TEYL classroom. These activities derive from various teaching resources available for TEYL and are commonly integrated into teacher education programmes during teacher training (*Referendariat*) in Germany. Also, I have worked with these activities in practice for several years and found them very helpful and productive to foster speaking practice in the young learners EFL classroom.

Repetitive scenarios, as Bland (2019) describes them, are routines in classroom management, such as giving work instructions, setting up tasks, distributing material, or giving feedback "supply opportunities for realistic target-language use" (2019, p. 82). Bland moreover claims them to be the reason why teachers of young learners must learn to use English flexibly to be able to lead through an English lesson and the daily classroom activities with ease. Therefore, an early beginning of establishing and further developing a manageable, reasonable, and

comprehensible repertoire of classroom phrases in the target language is essential.

4.1 Daily classroom routines in English

The daily classroom routine is a great opportunity to introduce classroom phrases with increasing difficulty using gestures, facial expressions, and body language for contextualisation. The morning circle can be held in English starting with an English greeting, a song, and checking the daily attendance provides an opportunity to practice counting. The daily schedule is presented in English including the actual date, the time of the year, and the daily weather report. At the beginning of the school year, this practice might be for the most part teacher-driven: The new words are gradually introduced in a meaningful context and implicitly anchored through daily repetition. The teacher keeps a close eye on pronunciation and lets the whole group repeat chorally and individually. After some days or weeks, some students are invited to perform this task on their own and function as “the daily speaker”, taking on the role of the teacher. Simple everyday activities in the classroom like standing up and sitting down, switching on the lights, opening the windows to let fresh air in, closing and opening the door, changing organizational structures (group/partner work, come to the front and sit in a circle), handing out materials, asking for attention/silence, getting ready for the next lesson and simple task instructions offer the possibility of integrating English into the daily classroom routine (ISB, 2021). With the help of picture cards attached to the respective objects and places in the classroom, the children are reminded of the vocabulary and enabled to use them actively. What might at first start with a very passive role of the students – listening, contextualising, and understanding – will lead to growing engagement.

Word cards labelling important objects in the classroom indirectly introduce them to new word groups in a meaningful and action-oriented way. As Böttger states, implicit learning processes without required attention offer special potential for early English learning (2020, p. 28). In the same way, (movement) games with familiar content and classroom rituals forming an integral part of the daily routine can be executed in English (Böttger, 2020). The learning is linked to new, different content

and the active component supports holistic learning and memorisation. Popular primary school games like *Simon says*, *corner arithmetic* (*Eckenrechnen*), *movement memory* (*Bewegungsmemory*), *giant-human-dwarf* (*Riese, Mensch, Zwerg*), *hangman*, etc. can be played in English if the concepts and rules are well known to learners in German. Classroom services (*Klassendienste*) and the assigned tasks are introduced step-by-step in English by referring to their tasks with already known classroom phrases during the everyday classroom routines ("*delivery service*": *handing out worksheets*, "*airing service*": *opening/closing the windows*, "*board service*": *cleaning the board*, etc.). After some time and repeated use of the English words and structures, the students will get used to refer to the tasks in English. *Magic words* (e.g., *Thank you*, *You're welcome*, etc.) can also become part of the classroom language by following the example of the teacher: The teacher reminds the students of the *magic words* every time teaching material is handed out or interaction takes place in English. An English farewell song, rhyme, or rap can end the school day. Even on schooldays without one of the two (or more) weekly English lessons, a rather considerable amount of English can therefore be spoken throughout the day. Patience, repetition, and persistence pay off as after a while, the children use English in classroom situations more naturally. Table 2 provides a summary of proposed activities and methods.

	Examples	Competences	Vocabulary
Classroom routines	greeting (farewell) songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - address and greet, and say goodbye to someone - ask how someone is feeling, express personal feelings and state of mind 	<i>greetings and farewell, courtesies</i>
	date/weather announcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - communicate orally using elementary thematic vocabulary - festivities and customs, current events 	<i>numbers, days of the week, months, seasons, holidays, weather, adjectives</i>
	Daily schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide information about the school, class, teachers (school life) 	<i>school subjects, special events</i>
	Daily attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide and ask for information about the class (school life) 	<i>numbers, "...is missing"</i>
	Classroom services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - imitate typical sounds and sound combinations, and use them intelligibly and largely correctly - understand simple task instructions and respond to them verbally and non-verbally 	<i>rooms and furniture, school things, household chores, etc.</i>
	"Magic words"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give thanks and to respond to thanks (courtesies) 	<i>"Thank you, Here you are, You 're welcome, Please" etc.</i>
Games & songs	Task instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understand simple task instructions and respond to them verbally and non-verbally (e.g., frequently recurring classroom phrases; craft instructions) 	<i>"Listen., Write down., Colour in. Cut out., Work with your partner." etc.</i>
	Movement games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understand games instructions and respond to them verbally and non-verbally - Total Physical Response (TPR) 	<i>parts of the body, movements, actions (e.g. Simon says, ...)</i>
	Movement songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understand simple instructions for action and respond to them verbally and non-verbally - recite well-practiced short texts (e.g., rhymes or raps) from memory and sound 	<i>parts of the body, verbs, (e.g. head, shoulders, knees and toes, ...)</i>

	Examples	Competences	Vocabulary
Classroom surroundings	Picture cards	- read individual words they have previously heard and developed in terms of content aloud correctly after repeating them several times	<i>rooms and furniture, school things, toys</i>
Other subjects	Maths	- understand and exercise arithmetic operations in English (e.g., corner arithmetic game, mental calculation, ...)	<i>numbers, arithmetic operators, etc.</i>
	Physical education	- understand simple game instructions and respond to them verbally and non-verbally	<i>sports, hobbies, body parts, etc.</i>
	Arts and crafts	- describe in simple words what they see in pictures, photographs	<i>colours, artists, etc.</i>
	Science and nature (geography)	- consciously pay attention to gestures, facial expressions, images, or the situational or linguistic context in order to infer content or the meaning of new words	<i>animals, pets, the weather, family and friends, vegetables and fruit, Great Britain, the USA, etc.</i>

Table 2: Ways of getting your learner to talk English (based on ISB, 2021)

The more connected, more varied, more often – the better: Getting young learners to speak English from the start is dependent on the learning atmosphere and on the classroom management, the primacy of oral communication, the quantity and the quality of language input, and practice. A wide range of opportunities to use the language in diverse contexts and situations can help young learners to build a stable network of vocabulary and sentence structures in the foreign language early on.

4.2 English lessons: structure, rituals, and classroom management

The speaking practice during English lessons benefits strongly from establishing early rules and structures. The aim is to enable as much speaking time as possible with high student participation. Clearly defined English-/German-speaking-times and nonverbal signs help communicate

without switching to German. At the beginning of each English lesson, a clearly defined “switch to English” with the whole class should take place. This can be achieved through an English rhyme/chant/song at the beginning and the joint phrase “Let’s click/switch to English!”. Whenever the teacher feels the need to switch to German during the lesson (e.g., explaining grammatical/intercultural content, giving complex task instruction), the whole class “clicks to German”. German phases should be as short and rare as possible and have a clearly defined ending (“Let’s click back to English!”). By letting the whole class chant and snip the switching back together with their fingers, they are made aware of the language change.

At the beginning of each English lesson, a warming up phase should follow the greeting to give every student the possibility to warm up with the language and repeat vocabulary from the lesson before. There are various ways of warming up, often depending on the individual lesson goal. In the form of a double circle (*Kugellager*) in front of the classroom, learners can practice vocabulary with the help of picture cards and sentence structures fixated on the designated “English wall” or the board. Within only 5 to 10 minutes, every student practices the words with changing partners. Using the method of the *marketplace* or *chat points*, with some guidance in the form of a “Let’s talk” fan (Figure 1) filled with conversation questions and sentences, all students practice simultaneously and actively.

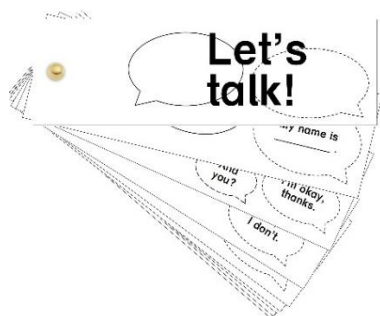


Figure 1: “Let’s talk” fan (own source)

Just like speaking activities, games should also have a clear structure that is introduced from the beginning. Every introduction of new vocabulary should be followed by various games to practice and deepen the learning experience. Games like *What's missing*, *Repeat if it's true*, *Charades (Pantomime)*, *Pictionary (Montagsmaler)*, *Snap!*, are a vital part of every English lesson. Teachers can initially introduce rules in German to make sure every student understands them. At a later point in time, the English instructions might be sufficient. When it comes to task instructions in the foreign language generally, picture cards visualising the desired activity (e.g., *Cut out.*, *Stick in.*, *Tick the correct answer.*, etc.) can be useful tools. Thus, instructions can be made sticking to the foreign language and the related pictures can be fixed to the board. As a positive side effect, with one glimpse at the board during their activities, the students are reminded of what is required of them. Task instruction cards can be as well used outside the EFL classroom for other main subjects.

4.3 Dialogue practice in the TEYL classroom

This section discusses the potential of dialogue lessons for starting free speaking production in the young learners' EFL classroom. As a part of every curriculum, the basics of age-appropriate conversation in English about oneself, one's hobbies, family, and friends can be introduced and practiced early on. This conversational practice can take place with a hand puppet, a partner/group, or the teacher. Starting with easy Q&A structures, the students can be challenged with gap dialogues needing to be filled in with further information. Flow charts can help to master more difficult dialogues like ordering food/drinks, interviewing a person, inviting somebody to a party, going to the flea market, or looking for a new pet.

The basic structure of each dialogue is presented to the students in an introductory lesson with the help of a short video clip or a role play by the teacher. Important vocabulary necessary to understand and perform the dialogue should be introduced and practiced in the preceding lessons. The first step is to make sure the students understand new words by using gestures, body language, and facial expressions as well as realia. Questions and listening tasks guide the student's attention during a

second presentation of the situation and give the teacher feedback on how much they understood so far and what needs to be explained more thoroughly. Extensive pronunciation training and repetition follow to enable fluent pronunciation and intonation. If needed, a short grammar excursion can be added to explain the derivation of the short form (*I'd like* = *I would like*, *I've got* = *I have got*, etc.) or how to form the plural in English (e.g., *one apple* – *two apples*, *one strawberry* – *two strawberries*, *one fish* – *two fish*, etc.). After a teacher-centred introduction, the students practice the dialogue and the new words in pair work. The roles change after each round and they give each other feedback on content, pronunciation, and acting out. The use of realia such as microphones, a purse, or items to be sold has been proven to be practical and engaging for students. Furthermore, a student desk placed between the two dialogue partners can create a more realistic setting and help the students to take on the roles more easily. In addition to the dialogue structure on the board, printed versions of the flow chart can be very helpful while practicing in small groups. The structure of the flow charts (Figure 2) helps each speaker to identify his or her part and gives a guideline for the students to try out different dialogue types.

Depending on the abilities of learners, the flow charts can be altered and adapted to their level of proficiency (e.g., negotiating the price, buying several items, asking for help, etc.). To produce extended talk, preparation time and various opportunities for practice with the dialogue partner(s) are crucial. Giving each group the possibility to present their dialogue and praising their effort in front of the class motivates others to continue to speak English in class. With the help of listening tasks, every student is included in the final presentation and takes part in optimising every individual's performance. Designated groups can look and listen for pronunciation, content, volume, and the quality of the acting out.

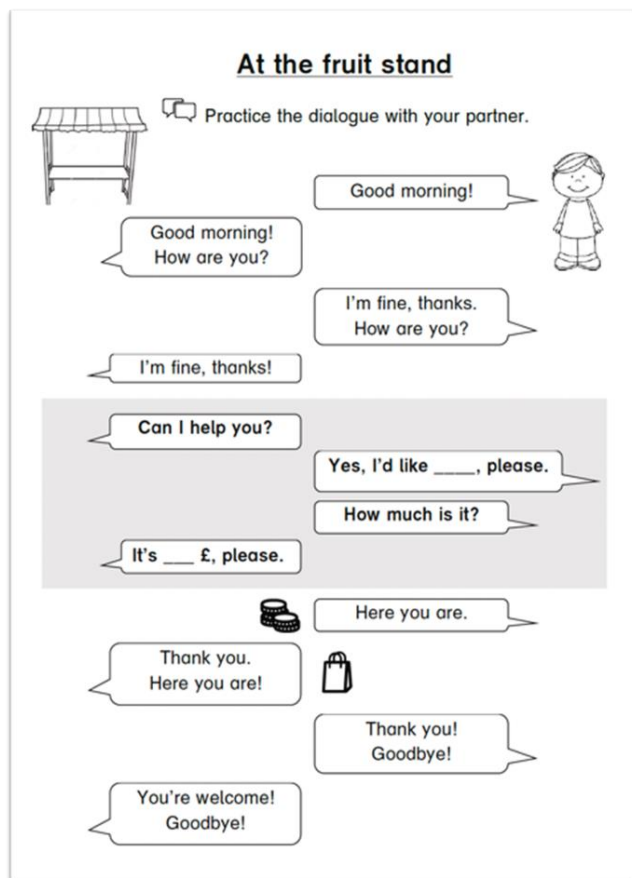


Figure 2: Flow chart: “At the fruit stand” (own source)

Textbooks can play a role in this context – depending on which issues or editions are used – as they offer various speaking occasions (e.g., crowd scenes (*Wimmelbilder*) at the beginning of each new unit) and ideas for communicative situations. They provide the young learners with useful vocabulary and the teacher with examples on how to introduce the corresponding topic and offer material like flow charts and picture cards. Textbooks in class size, if at hand, offer a resource-efficient way of equipping the students during group work with curriculum-relevant working material. Digital devices can also be useful, depending on

technology available in the classroom, as they combine audio and visualisation in one place at the learner's hand. With the help of free tools like for example the app *Book Creator*³, teachers can create engaging eBooks containing the new vocabulary/topic as text, images, audio and video. Learners can repeatedly re-listen to new words/sentences with headphones, practice pronunciation individually on their own and solve easy tasks. Learning apps like for example *ANTON*⁴ offer a wide variety of English exercises including topics like basic everyday vocabulary, conversational English, intercultural content and special days across all four grade levels. The task formats range from listening, matching, pairing, spelling, writing and reading activities and include quizzes and tests at the end of each unit. Learners get engaged and motivated to practice by colourful layouts, designs and the concept of gamification itself.

Working in smaller groups allows young learners to speak English in a more intimate setting. It might be easier for them to open and practice their speaking skills than it would in a classroom situation where a mistake will be recognized more openly by fellow students. Loder-Buechel (2020) points out effective ideas on how to get young learners to stick to English during classroom interaction. She strongly encourages to model the behaviour we want our learners to employ: "Paraphrasing, using body language and simply asking for help when you yourself can't find the language are the same strategic competence skills, we should teach our learners" (2020, p. 24). During group work, for example, it is especially difficult to get young learners to stick to the English language. Loder-Buechel proposes the use of props: A bean bag with a picture of an English-speaking person (e.g., The Queen, Greta Thunberg, etc.) attached to it wanders over to sit in front of a group switching back to German

³ *Book Creator* is a digital book-creating tool with various options to combine text, audio, images and video into an eBook that can be published and used on various digital devices (<https://bookcreator.com>).

⁴ *ANTON* is a universal learning platform (web & mobile) for school and students that can be used for independent self-learning as well as for interactive learning in a classroom context. The project "ANTON – Learning Platform for School" is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (<https://anton.app/de/>).

during group work, suggesting it wants to be part of the convo, too (2020, p. 27). This reminder helps young learners to recognise when they switch back to their mother tongue. It gives them time to react without being embarrassed by the teacher for making a mistake. There could also be a *Stammtisch* set up somewhere in the classroom a group can go to whenever something during their group work needs to be discussed or settled in German (e.g., because of its complexity, unknown words) (2020, p. 26). “By doing so, they are aware of the switch and how long they have switched, and the teacher can monitor or provide necessary support” if needed (Loder-Buechel, 2020, p. 26). As young learners are reminded of their usage of the first language in the EFL classroom, their awareness of the foreign language rises and shapes their future use and frequency of it. The teacher takes up a supportive position and provides scaffolding. After some time, English will take a more predominant position in classroom interactions between teacher and students.

5. Conclusion: Immersive teaching scenarios

Motivation and practice, a positive mindset and self-confidence are key when it comes to getting young learners to speak English from the start. As this contribution has shown, emphasizing meaningful pronunciation and dialogue practice, cultivating English as the classroom language in various ways, and using every opportunity possible to stick to English, young learners are equipped with what it takes to speak English from the start. Meaningful speaking tasks and activities – giving the students something they want to talk about – bring life to foreign language lessons. Adding the element of choice to language tasks encourages young learners to get involved and show their interests and expertise. When children are personally involved in a task and are given a chance to talk, participation increases automatically. In contrast, when too much is demanded from them, they might feel inhibited and will tend to produce only single words or formulaic sentences instead of freely taking part in the conversation. It is the teacher’s responsibility to adjust tasks and topics to relate to the young learners interests to get them to speak the foreign language (Cameron, 2001; Sullivan & Weeks, 2019).

Given the limited amount of actual teaching time, the organisational constraints, and the lack of uniform national education standards for EFL teaching in primary schools in Germany, immersive learning scenarios gain importance. As German primary schools follow a class teacher system, the possibility of extended exposure to English for young learners is given by introducing immersive learning scenarios to the classroom. With cross-curricular teaching, task-based language learning, and CLIL scenarios (see Steinlen and Piske in this volume), more than just the weekly English lessons are held in English. Young learners can profit from various teaching situations in which they get used to listening to and improve their speaking skills. This requires teachers to rely on solid language skills, knowledge, and experience on how to teach English as a foreign language to young learners. Therefore, teacher training and in-school training for English teachers are important factors when it comes to improving the quality and thus the quantity of English teaching in primary schools.

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