

LANGUAGE (EFL) INTEGRATION WITH OTHER AREAS OF THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM FOCUSING ON ART

The process of carrying out Art and craft work in English lessons helps the teacher achieve linguistic aims by means of non – linguistic activities, which let the children feel relaxed and content, and develop their creativity, self-confidence and independence.

Art is extremely suitable for foreign language teaching to young learners (6-7-year-olds). There are several reasons why this is so. It is well known that little children, almost with no exception, love drawing, painting, modelling and all sorts of building activities. They are imaginative, curious and open to new experience, especially if the challenge is adequate to their age and stimulating with a pleasant feedback, that is, good results. Children at this age are still easily convinced that they can draw “just anything”, and they rarely reject any suggestion. While drawing they are quite unaware of non-artistic objectives that the foreign language teacher wants them to attain. In that way the teacher can effectively reach linguistic aims by means of non-linguistic activities, while the pupils feel relaxed and “at home” in their foreign language classes. And yet this pleasant and friendly atmosphere might very soon turn into a boring routine if the children are not periodically exposed to a certain amount of change and surprise. Cleverly measured surprise helps to break off teaching and learning routine. The same happens to artwork integrated into a foreign language. If art tasks given to children to do are funny, exaggerated or even absurd, they inevitably make teaching English more dynamic and interesting, and the children are more motivated. In this way possibilities of producing uninventive, schematic and stereotyped forms are avoided.

All this, in combination with other non-linguistic activities, creates a feeling among children that learning a foreign language means fun, pleasure and activity.

In order to attain satisfying results in both language study and artwork, neither of these two school subjects should be taught separately with their own aims. “Art for the sake of Art” and “language for the sake of language” should by all means be avoided. Moreover, foreign language and Art and craft lessons, as well as all areas of the curriculum (mother tongue, Maths, Primary science, music and P.E.) should be integrated as much as possible. I find cross-curricular teaching perfectly advisable for primary school, especially with young learners. Focussing on what is similar and common in different subjects and on Topic work, it comes close to children’s own way of satisfying their curiosity and their interests in the world around them. It also links classroom learning with the outside world much better than in traditional schooling (which is

unfortunately wide-spread in Croatia). It takes advantage of the fact that the utmost educational aims are common to all subjects.

My teaching EFL to young learners, besides its instructional aims, is based on two main educational objectives: to teach children to explore and to prompt them to independently solve any given problem, whether it is a linguistic, Maths, Art or even a practical everyday problem, since learning in school is only one aspect of children's daily learning with its ultimate aim, that is, to prepare them for the real life.

Art with its creativity aspect helps children a lot in this educational process.

Art and craft activities that my pupils perform in their English classes differ in range and targets, and can be divided into three main groups:

1. Quite simple drawings. They are done in the last ten minutes of an EFL class. They usually represent follow-up activities, with some examples of cross-curricular teaching.
2. More complex Art and craft tasks. They are carried out in the EFL class once a month or more rarely. They can be done as individual or group work, representing an indispensable activity in a Topic work / Project work in cross-curricular teaching. It may be preceded by a lesson in another school subject (e.g., the mother tongue or Science), continued in an English lesson, and then again followed by a Music or Art and craft lesson in the mother tongue.
3. Art and craft tasks in an EFL class, transferred directly from the Art curriculum. They are done either as a follow-up activity to an English lesson or during an entire Art lesson taught through the medium of English.

No matter which of these three groups of Art tasks is carried out in an English class, each should logically follow the content previously taught in English. Topic work serves this purpose best. Since no Art is done separately from contents in other school subjects, children can easily understand and accept it. Now the teacher only needs to stimulate their creativity and give them some instructions for practical work. The outcome of such well organized Art is good language performance, as well as good artwork. Both the teacher and the learners are satisfied.

1. Simple Art tasks as either follow-up activities or – cross-curricular teaching activities

- 1.1 Drawing as a follow-up activity has a double aim: to relax pupils and to revise new vocabulary and structures by means of dialogues between the teacher and pupils while drawing (*My family / pets / toys / friends*). Children's answers are usually short and unconventional, since they feel relaxed and free from "work", but they keep up the offered conversation in a friendly manner.

1.2 Illustrations of a rhyme, song or story (“*London Bridge*” / “*Three Little Kittens*” / “*Mouse Soup*” / “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*” / “*The Three Little Pigs*”) have two main purposes: to relax pupils and to revise new vocabulary. While illustrating its content, children also express their attitude to the particular rhyme / song / story. It may not have been used for some time in the class, though. Then the illustration takes a role of a reminder of both linguistic and emotional content.

1.3 Funny pictures obtained through a drawing dictation may have three main aims: to revise vocabulary in a relaxed manner, to check children’s vocabulary attainment and to develop children’s listening comprehension.

For example, the given space and size relations are purposely funny and unexpected to avoid pupils’ drawing a mechanical conclusion following their previous experience, but also to help children feel pleased and amused while doing the dictation. (Some examples with the first graders: *Draw a big mouse on the little house. Draw a carpet on a big vase. Draw a fat cat in a small hat.*)

1.4 Children’s work on the layout of greeting cards, notices or adverts represents a medium of introducing purposeful writing. (*Happy Birthday. / Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year / Be My Valentine. / Get well soon ... / Please shut the door. / Read this book: e.g., “The Three Little Pigs.”*)

These examples have both instructional and cultural aims. They mostly relate to the second graders.

1.5 Creating “MY PICTURE DICTIONARY”. Simple drawings accompany written words explaining their meaning. They also serve as visual reminders and are better for that purpose with very young learners than their written equivalents in the mother tongue. In my experience, young learners can much easier understand the purpose of a written form of an English word (which, unlike in Croatian, differs from a spoken form) when it is accompanied by a picture. The picture also helps children’s visual memory of the written word.

Such a PICTURE DICTIONARY relates to the second graders.

1.6 Drawings as an aid to explain a certain process in cross-curricular teaching link English lessons with other school subjects, e.g., Primary science (*The life-cycle of the butterfly: eggs – caterpillar – pupa - butterfly*), Maths (Pictorial stage of solving a problem, a numeral line with a leaping frog, etc.).

All these Art and craft activities described above are done by using pencils, coloured pencils or felt-tip pens in pupils’ sketch pads or notebooks with some exceptions of cardboard cards.

2. More complex Art and craft activities as an important stage in Topic work / Project work

2.1 A group drawing on a large piece of paper can summarize certain language content. (*The Funny / Good / Fat / Bright-coloured Monster; My favourite Dinosaur; The animals on the funny train*). Talking in English runs parallel with the drawing/painting if each pupil in the group is given a role in advance. An unusual topic and a large size of paper prompt children's creativity and ability to explore. It also builds a relaxed atmosphere. Moreover, the conversation in English achieves its language purpose and motivates children's artwork.

2.2 Artwork can be an indispensable stage in complex work with stories (e.g., "Foolish Goose" in the first grade): 1. listening to the story; 2. retelling with pictures; 3. making masks and simple pieces of scenery; 4. role-play.

Each child makes its own mask (goose – or owl – mask) in accordance with a mask-master, but with freedom to fully express his/her creativity. The linguistic purpose of this artwork is to revise certain vocabulary and structures, but also to introduce some useful instructions in English: *Cut out, paste, make small holes, use sticky tape*, etc. These activities help children develop their ability to make things, as well as their self-confidence and independence.

The process of making a useful thing also makes children's work purposeful and motivates them for Art classes, as well as for learning English.

The simple set design (the sun, the moon, stars, a river) is made during group activity. Large pieces of paper and the teacher's unusual suggestions prompt pupils' imagination, as well as help them not to present the well known themes in schematic shape. (*Draw the big bright-coloured sun in yellow, orange and red. Imagine the wind blowing; What happens with the water? Draw the waves... If the water is clean, can you see any fish? Draw a fish jumping...*)

The second graders worked on visual materials for the story "*The Enormous Turnip*" including magnetic cut-out figures of characters to put onto the blackboard, large adverts (*This book is good. Read it!*) with an "enormous turnip", a big picture-recipe for turnip-soup and individual illustrations for the front cover.

2.3 Children's Big Story Book ("*I can do it!*") is a group work, done in accordance with an original picture book, but with some text adaptation and free illustrations. Each child does one page: a picture and a simple caption.

Making up a book relates to the second graders.

2.4 Art and craft activities in the Project work "*Teddies' and Bears' Week*" with the first graders represent only one segment of cross-curricular activities, done in English and Croatian and shared between the specialist English teacher and the class teacher.

The Topic work is organized around “bears”. In their mother tongue lessons the teacher and pupils explore the traditional story “*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*”; in Science pupils study about bears; in Maths they add and subtract by means of magnetic teddy bears’ pictures, etc.

In English lessons the language work is based on the same story, but in English, including a picture book and two cassettes with a recorded story and a song.

There are plenty of materials to be compared, in the same way in which the same story told in two different languages is compared.

Children’s artwork is done with both teachers and is flexibly used as visual aids (supporting materials) whenever needed. It consists of simple sketches of teddies’ heads in the Maths notebook, drawings of the three bears and the three bowls in the sketch-pad, a comparative drawing of a real bear and a teddy in the writing-notebook, cut-out figures of Goldilocks and the Bears mounted onto sticks, a birthday card cut-out in the shape of a teddy’s head (with a story in the mother tongue).

In English classes my pupils have revised the skipping rhyme “*Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear...*” using some elements of P.E. exercises (*Jump high, reach the sky, touch your toes*). Some more “commands” are included: *turn around, touch the ground, bend head low, touch your toe*.

Playing an active role in this Project my pupils have developed an excellent feeling for purposeful learning and quite natural links among school subjects. There was also very good collaboration between the class teacher and me, even during our English lessons, since her English is very good. For the reasons described above all the lessons had that necessary continuity, without being interrupted every 45 minutes in accordance with the timetable.

Creative activities described from 2.1 to 2.4 can be done not only with coloured pencils and felt-tip pens, but also by collage (a technique of pasting either cut-out coloured papers or bits of newspaper and magazine illustrations on a sheet of paper), water-colours and tempera. Naturally, all these techniques added now to the list only make pupils’ Art activities more demanding, demand more serious preparations from both teacher and pupils and produce more problems while being performed.

In addition all this two-dimensional artwork (mostly drawing and painting), some three-dimensional Art and craft work can be added as well. Pupils can use some more or less easily obtainable materials: plasticine, clay, wire, sticks and tongue pressers (if laths are not accessible), cardboard boxes and cotton-wool, wool and cloth. (These three last items are specially suitable for puppet making).

There are several alternative examples for Art activities described under 2.1 – 2.4 with both first and second graders, each age group in accordance with its language and motor coordination abilities.

“*The Christmas Project*” includes some three-dimensional paper work: a free-standing Christmas tree decorated with simple cut-out figures and ornaments, all done following teachers’ instructions.

The “*Fruit and Vegetable*” Project / Topic work includes plasticine modelling of fruit and vegetable items to “sell in the shop/market”, as well as three-dimensional fruit containers, paper bags, free standing shop signs and fruit labels, all made of paper.

In the “*Teddies’ and Bears’ Week*” Project the three bowls (of different size) could be modelled in plasticine or clay instead of being drawn.

The choice of an art technique should, in general, depend on pupils’ age, as well as on the teacher’s own preference for particular ones. But, at any rate it is, in my opinion, useful to collaborate with the art teacher, especially if you expect high standard quality of your pupils’ artwork. Since I am lucky enough to have been also trained in art teaching, I find all this much easier.

3. Art and craft tasks in EFL classes transferred from Art and craft curriculum

The notion of “*texture*” is being explored in the Art curriculum, while “*Senses*” are being taught in continuity from kindergarten to school subjects “Primary Science” and “Science”.

Artwork with tasks about “*texture*” should follow the Topic work curriculum links when transferred to English classes. It has to be preceded by the Unit “*Senses*” whose main theme is worked out in detail in the subunit “*The Senses of Touch*”. (*What do you touch things with? What does ... feel like? It feels hard/rough. The texture of something is the way it feels when touched.*)

The drawings in pencil, coloured pencils or felt-tip pens can show analysis of the texture of fur, bark, walnut and wild chestnut shells, roots...

Similar Art and craft tasks can also be explored in plasticine or clay.

Bibliography

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