

*Foreign Languages
in Steiner Waldorf
Education*

*Laying the Foundation:
The First Three Years of English*

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Why Teach Foreign Languages in the Lower School?

One of the striking features of the first Waldorf School, founded by Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart in 1919, was that all pupils from Class 1 up were taught two foreign languages. Prior to that, foreign language learning in German schools (starting in Class 5) had been the privilege of those children belonging to middle and upper class families. What reasons did Rudolf Steiner give for introducing foreign languages for all children at this unprecedented, early age? These were certainly very different from the pragmatic reasons for teaching and learning foreign languages which have become increasingly important in society throughout the decades since then.

Rudolf Steiner's educational values were of an entirely different nature. To begin with, he emphasized that anything children are taught at school should be based on genuine anthropology. In other words, a true understanding of the developing human being and his inherent talents should be at the heart of all teaching and education.

The encounter with other languages should not only serve to extend the individual's horizon in a formal manner. It should also enrich and diversify his inner life, nurturing his very soul. It was vital, so Steiner maintained, to introduce languages other than one's own as a means of counteracting whatever one-sided influence any particular language exerted on the developing child. By getting to name and recognize the objects in the world around him in a new way through the medium of a foreign language, every child would be given the opportunity to break free from the confines of his mother tongue. Education of this kind would prevent children from growing up into narrow-minded, nationalistically prejudiced adults. Instead of encouraging attitudes that ultimately separate people and nations from one another, tolerance and mutual understanding between nations should be consciously cultivated.

The fact that the different languages in our world shape the inner life and viewpoints of their speakers in their own ways - revealing unique and totally varying aspects of human nature - had to be taken into account in education.

This view strongly coincides with Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea that inherent within

¹ A more comprehensive treatment of this subject is to be found - in German - in the following books:
C. Jaffke 1996 *Fremdsprachenunterricht auf der Primarstufe. Seine Begründung und Praxis in der Waldorfpädagogik*. 2nd, revised edition. Weinheim
M. Maier/C. Jaffke 1997 *Fremdsprachen für alle Kinder. Erfahrungen der Waldorfschulen mit dem Frühbeginn*. Leipzig et al.

every single language lies a distinct and characteristic way of looking at the world:

The whole manner in which objects are subjectively perceived inevitably forms the structures and usage of language ... The individual word is created by this perception. It is not an imprint of the object itself, but of the picture it creates in the soul.

This concept of language - within the context of early foreign language learning - has been gaining ground in recent decades, for instance in the work of the Russian psycholinguist A. A. Leont'ev, who repeatedly stresses the importance of learning a foreign language not merely in order to acquire a new communicative tool, but rather as a means of opening up a new world and encountering a new culture.

There are, of course, additional reasons for getting children to start learning foreign languages well before puberty. It has been scientifically established, for instance, that there are sensitive periods for language acquisition during a child's development. The probability of acquiring a near-native pronunciation, for example, seems to be the higher the earlier a child starts learning a foreign language.

This might lead us to think that foreign languages should even be taught to children in kindergarten, something that has been proved possible in various places. This should not, however, be taken as a model to be copied. Young children have so many other things to learn and develop before casting their first milk teeth and need their etheric or growth forces for this whole process. It must be mentioned, though, that Rudolf Steiner, when asked by teachers in England about suitable teaching subjects for nursery classes, replied that teaching the little ones foreign languages was the "least harmful" of intellectual pursuits.

Which Foreign Language(s)?

Rudolf Steiner was surprisingly pragmatic when it came to choosing the two particular foreign languages for young school children to learn. During his last cycle of lectures on education in England (Torquay 1924) people asked him which languages would be most appropriate for a future Waldorf School in England. Steiner said that this choice should be made on purely opportunistic grounds.

The only thing that should influence this decision was whatever the respective life situation required. In Germany, in the Stuttgart Waldorf School, English had been chosen "because it is a world language and will be even more so in the future". The question as to which language the children should learn in the Lower School was, to Steiner's mind, much less important than the fact that foreign languages were being

taught at all.

Sometimes parents ask teachers whether or not it is asking too much of the children to have to tackle two foreign languages at the same time when they are still so young. These parents usually think that this may have a negative influence on the development of their child's mother tongue. The fact is that no such negative influence has ever been observed. On the contrary, familiarizing themselves with new sounds, a different intonation, new rhythms and ways of expressing themselves, considerably enriches the children's language awareness and has a beneficial effect on the development of the mother tongue. Research carried out in main stream education has also found this to be the case.

Teaching Environment

A language teacher in the Lower School has to be aware of the larger context within which she teaches her particular language. There is the other foreign language to consider, and there are all the other subjects - apart from Main Lesson - that the children have in the course of a week, such as music, eurhythmy, needlework and religion. A language teacher should have a realistic picture of what the children are doing in the other lessons, because it will have an influence on the material she herself chooses. For instance, there will be less need for a great deal of movement in an English lesson if the class has already had eurhythmy on the same day. Similarly, the amount of singing will be reduced on days when the children have their music lessons.

The number of weekly language lessons taught in the first few years has to be looked at from this point of view. The timetable of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart included three lessons per week for either foreign language. A survey carried out in Germany in the early 1990s showed that only about 25% of Waldorf Schools still offered six foreign language lessons per week in the first three classes. This highly questionable reduction of the weekly language lessons to two (per language) is often the result of financial constraints or of staffing problems. In some schools this has even led to the very regrettable situation of the second foreign language not being introduced until Class 2 or 3.

The teacher of a Class 1 or 2 will often find that it is asking quite a lot of the children to be and remain immersed in the sounds of a foreign language for a full forty-five minute period. Therefore some schools have introduced shorter foreign language lessons, lasting about twenty minutes for each language, possibly five times a week and often incorporated into the same forty-five-minute period. This has turned out to be a

very helpful arrangement, even if it means a class has two different teachers and two different languages within a relatively short time span. Experience has shown that the prevailing sanguine temperament of this age group makes this possible.

Which Teacher?

In the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, foreign languages in the lower classes were often taught by class teachers. This meant that the teacher knew her class very well, thus minimizing discipline problems. Class teachers, on the other hand, sometimes have the disadvantage of not being as proficient in the foreign language as a fully trained language teacher who has studied her subject thoroughly. This is where the native speaker among the language teachers is at a great advantage. She is the “living representative” of the language the children are learning and has the authentic body language that is such an important component of any particular language. If she also possesses all the other necessary attributes of a Lower School teacher - among them the love and understanding of children of this age group, flexibility, and a good sense of humour - and, in addition to all this, a sufficient repertoire of English nursery rhymes, poems, games and songs etc., she will be ideally suited to present the language in an authentic way, so to speak, and will not find it difficult to maintain the use of the foreign language throughout her lessons. Another pedagogical aspect should also be taken into consideration. It is essential for each class in the Lower School to have a team of teachers working together, because this allows the children to be perceived and assessed from different perspectives.

Methodical Approach

Rudolf Steiner gave various indications about the way children could be introduced to foreign languages in the first three years of school. The single most important suggestion is probably that the children should encounter the new language in a direct way, i.e., *not* through translation, but by “matching the words with the objects”. At the time, this was quite a revolutionary approach, but in the course of the 20th century, it gained almost universal acceptance for the teaching of foreign languages to children of this age (‘Direct Method’). As far as concrete objects are concerned, this is definitely the most obvious approach. The children’s mother tongue should, as a general rule, be reserved for “emergency situations”, e.g. when a child has hurt himself, when a quarrel among two pupils needs to be settled or for other urgent matters of classroom discipline. As an exception to this general rule, teachers have always found it convenient to use the children’s mother tongue when introducing a new language game

that would otherwise take far too long to explain in the foreign language.

Just as children, while learning their mother tongue, proceed from pointing and moving to actually saying things, so purposeful movement plays a very important part in learning a second language in the Lower School. Teachers will try to find as many opportunities as possible for the children to move and actually do things, both in response to simple commands, as is done in what is now called Asher's *Total Physical Response*, and along with the teacher in verses and songs. The emphasis for the children then will be on the activity itself rather than on language learning. This coincides with what more recently has become known as *Natural Second Language Acquisition*, a term coined by Krashen and Terrell (1983). One of the axioms of their theory is this: "Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning." In a similar vein, Rudolf Steiner said the children should be trained in the ability to have little conversations about everyday life in the foreign language ["sachliches Konversieren"]. This includes topics like classroom objects, family, pets, the weather, food, etc.

"Poetry Before Prose"

This more 'pragmatic' aspect of teaching, i.e. the practical ability to communicate in the foreign language, has to be balanced by the second pillar on which foreign language learning in the Lower School is based: poetry. Again and again, Rudolf Steiner emphasized the importance of using poetic language in the first three classes. Anyone who has taught pupils of this age for a longer period of time is bound to have noticed how helpful this advice is. Poetic language, based on rhythm and rhyme, is learned far more easily by children than is prose language. Along with singing, poetic language introduces the children to the flow of the new language and also familiarizes them with its prosodic/paraverbal elements: emphasis, intonation, pitch, etc. or, more generally speaking, with that part of human speech which is not expressed by the contents of the words.

To underline the importance of the poetic element in the first few years of language teaching, the collection of teaching material for the Lower School was given the title *Rhythms, Rhymes, Games and Songs*.

The fact that our work in the Lower School always rests on these two pillars - pragmatic and poetic language - represents another challenge to us as teachers, as we keep trying to strike an even balance between these two poles.

When we refer to concrete objects such as the parts of the body or things in the

classroom, children generally grasp immediately what is being talked about. This also holds true for many of the action rhymes and ‘set phrases’ or chunks of words that we use when playing games in class (see examples below).

Poetic language, by contrast, requires the children to be patient and prepared to listen inwardly and to realise that understanding may be a process that takes time. When we manage to give the children, on the one hand, enough language that is easily understood and, on the other, a reasonable amount that “demands patience”, they gradually learn to feel their way into understanding the meaning of even complex poetic forms and structures without these being mentioned. Understanding is prompted by emotion and empathy.

The Value of Playing Games and Using ‘Formulaic Phrases’

While at play, children instil meaning, creative imagination, intelligence and joy into their will-power activity ... Play is the activity in which all of the child’s faculties work together in perfect unison.¹

Playing games is an important part of language lessons in the Lower School. Some people might think that ‘playing’ at this age means fooling around or wasting time. Yet, there is ample reason to take seriously what the German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller wrote in his *Letters Concerning the Aesthetic Education of Man*: “Only when we are playing, are we human beings in the true sense of the word.” This becomes obvious when we watch small children in a play situation. We cannot fail to notice that they are completely involved in and absorbed by their activity. In language games in the Lower School, too, the focus is so much on the activity that the children are hardly aware of the fact that they are using a foreign language. This mirrors the way children acquire their first language - through activities and by imitating the speech models in their surroundings.

Research carried out twenty years ago on behalf of the Audio-Visual Society of America showed that we remember 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we hear and see, and 90% of what we experience through active participation.² Just as in first language acquisition it is the learner’s own active involvement that enables him to grow into his mother tongue, so it is the child’s own both external and inner activity in the classroom that enables him to make progress in a foreign language in the Lower School. In an “activity-based” teaching approach, language games have their rightful place, and

¹ E.-M. Kranich 1992, „Entwicklung und Erziehung in der frühen Kindheit“, in: S. Leber (ed.) *Die Pädagogik der Waldorfschule und ihre Grundlagen*. 3., revised edition. Darmstadt, p. 80

² Reported in the German weekly paper DIE ZEIT, November 21, 2002.

indeed are an indispensable part of the agenda. They should have a special place in every Lower School language teacher's repertoire, not just because the children like them more than other activities, but because they offer a unique way of enticing the children to speak the language. The child focuses on the action, not on speaking or on groping for words, and the enjoyment of active participation in a language game removes any inhibitions a particular child might have.

Here are a number of exemplary sequences for activities and games that are all based on some kind of verse as a starting-point:

*These are my eyes
And these are my toes,
These are my fingers
And this is my nose.
These are my knees
And this is my head,
And when I sleep
I am in bed.
My arms and legs
I use to play -
A happy child
The whole long day.*

*

*I have two feet,
Two hands, you see,
Two eyes, two ears,
And this is me.
My hands have ten fingers,
My feet have ten toes,
I write with my fingers,
I dance on my toes.*

Once the children have mastered several such verses with the help of meaningful movements in groups and later as individuals these can be supplemented by other expressions from the same group of words. Then the teacher can set small tasks to be carried out "spontaneously". In one of his conferences with the teachers, Rudolf Steiner recommended that, in foreign language lessons in the Lower School, we should "cultivate the element of reflex actions induced by the language" ["das Reflexbewegungsartige der Sprache pflegen"]:

- *Shut your eyes!*
- *Put your hands on your head!*
- *Wave your right hand!*
- *Put your right hand on your left knee!*
- *Put your left hand on your right elbow!*
- *Twiddle your thumbs!*
- *Rub your nose!*
- *Clap your hands five times!*
- *Cross your arms!*
- *Stand on your left foot!*
- *Stamp your feet three times!*
- *Open your eyes!*

Actions of this kind are particularly suited to the early phases - even in Class 1 - as the children do not have to actually speak as yet. Understanding the request or instruction (the “order”) is the only thing that matters at this point.

In Class 2, this kind of activity lends itself to handing over the teacher’s role to the children, at first to one of the more talented ones, later to others, too. Again, only comprehension and non-verbal reaction are required in the following variation:

In two concentric circles, ten to twelve children stand in pairs, each facing their partner. One child stands in the middle and calls out little tasks for the others to perform, such as the following:

- *Stand back to back!*
- *Shake hands!*
- *Run round each other!*
- *Touch each other’s shoulders! ...*
- *All change!*

When the last “order” has been given, all the children have to rush to find a new partner. The child in the middle also joins in and tries to grab a partner. The one who is left without a partner goes into the middle to give orders during the next round.

At a more advanced stage, probably in the second half of Class 2, the highly popular game *Simon Says* or *O’Grady Says* offers a new challenge. In quick succession the teacher, later on one of the pupils (possibly standing on a chair to get a better view of what is going on), calls out instructions for tasks that are easy to carry out:

O'Grady (Simon) says:

- *Touch your head!*
- *Kneel on your chair!*
- *Stand straight!*
- *Put your hands on your knees!*
- *Shut your eyes!*
- *Put your thumbs on your ears!*
- *Point at the ceiling!*

The children are not allowed to move unless the instruction is preceded by "O'Grady (Simon) says". Children who forget this rule and move at the wrong time are out of the game and have to sit down.

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As in first language acquisition, formulaic phrases (chunks) also play an important part in countless situations in foreign language learning in the Lower School.

A typical example of this is the playful little dialogue *Please, Mr Crocodile, may I cross the water?*

To be able to play this game, the children must first have learnt a number of colours. The child representing Mr or Mrs Crocodile stands at the front of the room directly facing the door. At the opposite end, close to the window, five or six children stand next to each other. One after the other, they call out:

*Please, Mr (Mrs) Crocodile, may I cross the water
To visit your fair daughter?*

The answer is:

Yes, you may, if you're wearing something ... (blue, grey, pink, etc.)

The child in question then replies, for instance:

There is some pink in my socks,

and is allowed to take one step forward. If he does not have the particular colour on him he says:

I'm not wearing anything ... (that colour)

and stays put. The child that gets to Mrs/Mr Crocodile first, pats her or him on the back and assumes the role of the crocodile in the next round.

Movement becomes even more important in the following version of the game:

*Grandmother (-father), may I come?
Yes, you may ...* (sometimes also: *No, you may not!*)

How many steps?

Take two ... (baby steps, giant steps, grasshopper steps, etc.)

*

The following examples demonstrate the value of games like this for laying the foundation for the grammar work of the Middle School. Though they are totally unaware of this at the time, the children build up a rich store of grammatical forms and structures during the first three years of school. In keeping with one of the basic concepts of Waldorf Education in the Lower School — *From Doing to Understanding* — the early experience of grammatical forms through movements serves as the basis for studying grammar and discovering rules in it later on. This latter type of work, or game, usually begins in Class 4 or 5. The following action rhyme is often introduced in Class 1 and offers countless opportunities for playful variations of questions and answers in different tenses:

I'm standing, I'm sitting,
I'm writing, I'm knitting.

I'm laughing, I'm looking,
I'm washing, I'm cooking.

I'm reading, I'm counting,
I'm swimming, I'm shouting.

I'm driving, I'm rowing,
I'm kneeling, I'm growing.

I'm eating, I'm drinking,
I'm talking, I'm thinking.

I show my right hand,
I show my left hand,

I'm giving, I'm taking,
I'm sweeping, I'm baking.

I show both my hands,
And now I will stand/sit still.

To begin with, this verse is spoken in chorus, accompanied by appropriate gestures. After this “experience”, individual children standing in front of the class carry out three to five actions and ask the other children:

S1: *Am I writing?*

S2: *No, you're not. You're drinking.*

S1: *Am I sweeping?*

S3: *No, you're not. You're baking.*

S1: *Am I reading?*

S4: *No, you're not. You're knitting ... etc.*

As a next step, one child leaves the room and performs an action outside in the corridor. Another child watches her through the half-open door. The children in the class ask the “doorkeeper”:

S1: *Is she running?*

S2: *No, she isn't.*

S3: *Is she looking?*

S2: *No, she isn't ...*

Yet another child in the class is given the task of counting how many questions it will take the class to find out what is happening outside in the corridor.

At a more advanced stage still, usually in Class 2 or 3, this dialogue can be changed into a guessing-game in which the forms of the past continuous tense are practised. One child goes out and, on coming back in, is asked by the other children what she was doing outside:

S1: *Were you running?*

S2: *No, I was not. (or: No, I wasn't.)*

S3: *Were you singing?*

S2: *No, I wasn't.*

S4: *Were you swimming?*

S2: *No, I wasn't.*

S5: *Were you laughing?*

S2: *No, I wasn't.*

S6: *Were you whispering?*

S2: *Yes, I was.*

Through unusual and highly imaginative actions in the corridor, some children manage to make the class ask more than forty (!) questions, before the final answer is given: "Yes, I was."

In yet another variation, three children go out together and agree on an action that they are going to "perform" in front of the class with gestures and mimicry. In this situation, the first and second person is used and the present tense is kept to. The following little dialogue can serve as an introduction to the following question-and-answer game:

Three pupils: *Three jolly Welshmen, here we come,
Willing to work for a bottle of rum.*

Class: *What can you do?*

Three pupils: *We'll show you!*

Now individual pupils start asking about all the various occupations they know, e.g.:

Are you a gardener, Sylvia?

No, I'm not.

Are you a cook, Michael?

No, I'm not ...

In the course of time, the children learn an astonishing variety of jobs and occupations. In one of my classes, for instance, we had the following: *fireman, pop-singer, policeman, baker, hairdresser, postman, joiner, mother, miller, cowboy, soldier, butler, teacher, and captain.*

To give the children a feeling for the use of the present perfect, it is once again advisable to start off with a concrete experience. One child stands in front of the class so that he can be seen clearly by everyone. Then he leaves the classroom and changes three things on his clothing, his hair, watch etc. On coming back in, he is asked questions like:

Have you pulled up your socks?

Have you taken off your watch?

Have you turned up your right sleeve?

Have you combed your hair?

Have you untied your shoe laces?

Have you turned your left trouser pocket inside out?

A similar feeling for the appropriate use of the simple present perfect tense can be gained by playing *Kim's Game*. For this, a number of objects, five or six, are placed on a tray or special cloth. One child looks at the arrangement very closely and then leaves the classroom. Now another child is allowed to "change three things". The child who was outside comes back in and asks questions like:

Has the ring been changed?

Has the pencil been changed?

Has the key been changed?

If she finds all three changes, she is allowed to choose the next pupil to go out and the pupil who is allowed to change three things.

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The above sequence of activities shows how we can create a secure framework within which the children are able to move with confidence and relative ease. This is made possible above all by the ample use of formulaic phrases, syntagma or chunks of language. To begin with, these are unanalysed, holistically learned *formulaic frames*, but as they are gradually comprehended, they are used in more creative contexts and are separated into their components. This is an approach that can save a great deal of

time. As one expert put it: “Where children are not exposed to planned opportunities to acquire prefabricated language, acquisition is much slower.”²

Variety of Methods

Apart from the professional qualifications and skills of the teacher, the classroom as a social framework is probably the decisive factor for the success or failure of language lessons in the Lower School. As teachers, we are the source of the new language for the children when we recite an action rhyme or introduce a comprehension exercise, counting-out rhyme, finger-play, new game or singing-game. Our aim will always be to engage the pupils in such a way that they feel it is their own effort that matters most of all. In choral speaking, this means the teacher will consciously and consistently try to withdraw, i.e. by speaking more softly and increasingly handing the activity over to the pupils. Experienced teachers have noticed, not just in the Lower School, that their own heightened efforts to ‘pull’ a class along often failed to create the desired effect. Quite the contrary! When, however, the teacher spoke more softly during choral practice - eventually just moving her lips - the children took over increasingly actively, because they felt that they were now responsible.

As for games, the teacher can usually reduce her activity to explaining the rules and choosing the first set of players. We always have one or two children in our classes who are particularly talented and can take over the teacher’s role and give instructions in the course of a game whenever necessary. This sets an example for other pupils who see and learn that it is possible for them, too, to carry out this kind of task.

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These days, a considerable amount of material for teaching English in the Lower School is available. It is not possible to give a detailed description of the various kinds here³. There is, however, one area that deserves special mentioning: scenic plays⁴. Apart from the two collections of plays, many poems and dialogues can be used, some of them

² O. Dunn 1989 *Beginning English with Young Learners*. London/Basingstoke: p. 5 - More recent research seems to confirm that “in

an evolution from chunks to creativity . . . rote-learned chunks also provide a valuable resource for developing grammar, as they are

broken down and re-constituted.” L. Cameron 2001 *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Cambridge: CUP, p. 102

³ See the 14 groups listed in the Table of Contents of *Rhythms, Rhymes, Games and Songs ...*

⁴ *Plays for the Lower and Middle School* and *More Plays for the Lower and Middle School* – These as well as all the other aids for

teachers have appeared in the series “Materials for Language Teaching at Rudolf Steiner (Waldorf) Schools”. Find details on the last page.

requiring slight adaptation. Short dialogues such as *The Postman* will be found to be particularly useful:

Every morning at eight o'clock,
We can hear the postman knock:
Knock, knock, knock,
Knock, knock, knock,
Here comes the postman,
Knock, knock, knock.

“Good morning, Mr Postman,
Tell me, tell me true,
Have you any letters
For number twenty-two?”

“Yes, I have,
One for your father,
Three for your mother,
One for your sister,
Two for your brother,
Seven altogether
For number twenty-two.”

“Thank you, Mr Postman,
That’s very kind of you.”

Little scenes like this are usually introduced by choral speaking, then the class is split into three groups: one is the “narrator”, who provides the frame of the actual dialogue, the second group takes the part of the girl or boy in the house that gets the letters from the postman, the third group “is” the postman himself. A few props such as a postman’s cap and a bag for the letters, and seven letters (with authentic stamps!) will make it much easier for the boy (or girl) to enter into this particular role.

Acting little scenes often develops from story-telling. *The Three Little Pigs* and *The Pancake* are well-known examples of this.

Scenic play is a very effective teaching tool. It enables the children to create a space for something new to happen by slipping into another role (and another language) and giving up part of themselves in the process. The sense of achievement that comes from being able to “carry” a part right through is particularly beneficial for children who are a bit shy or whose self-esteem needs boosting.

Planning, Practicalities and Stock-Taking

As teachers, we always think of what and how we are going to teach. As language teachers in the Lower School, we have to be especially conscious of and sensitive to the prevailing situation of any class at any particular moment: Will the next lesson be

on someone's birthday? Is there a new child in the class that we have to pay special attention to? What favourite activities does this particular class have as a whole? Are we prepared to throw our preparation for the next lesson overboard if the circumstances demand it? The first snow of the season, the death of a child's relative or the arrival of a new pet may be events that make us realise even before the lesson has started that we are going to have to deviate considerably from our original plan.

Apart from such "imponderables", on which, according to Rudolf Steiner, "everything depends", each one of us will have to think in great detail and very concretely how we are going to use the time available in the coming lesson. How are we going to structure it? Will the children be in their classroom at the beginning of the lesson or will they be coming from somewhere else, e.g. from the eurhythmy room? What "good habits" have we established concerning the beginning and end of the lessons? Experience clearly shows that "good habits" are a very important factor contributing considerably to the success or failure of our teaching efforts, especially in the first few years of school.

When we think of the actual language material that we plan to use, we will have to ask ourselves which opening verse we are going to recite with the children. For how many weeks or months are we going to keep it? Which items of the current repertoire have been practised long enough to be laid aside for a few months? What rhythmic activities (clapping/stamping) are we going to choose in order to enable the children to feel at home in the foreign language again as soon as possible? How long should we continue this opening phase?

What new item will follow from here? In every lesson there should be something to make the children realise: "We've never done *this* before." It may be at this point in the lesson that we carry on work with a poem and introduce two new lines, or that we teach a new clapping-game, counting-out rhyme or an additional verse of an already familiar song to the class. During this part of the lesson, the children have to make a conscious effort to grasp whatever new material is being offered. It is their "head-forces", their powers of observation and their intelligence that we are most strongly appealing to at this point.

After this, roughly half-way through the available time, comes that part of the lesson many teachers consider the most challenging: Practising the current repertoire of that particular class. Here the teacher needs to use all her presence of mind to create a sequence of language activities that is well balanced between speaking and singing, shouting and whispering, speaking in chorus and individually, moving about in the classroom and sitting quietly. Also in this part of the lesson, individual children's

requests will be integrated as far as possible. Concentration levels are usually lower at this advanced stage of the lesson, and so games will play a prominent part.

After we have engaged the children's "will forces" in this way, it is time for them to settle down to listen to a story (or to part of one). This does not necessarily have to happen in every lesson, but it is, generally speaking, one of the essential ingredients of foreign language teaching in the Lower School. Story-telling gives the children the chance to practise comprehension and gist-understanding. All the paraverbal means of mimicry, gesture, changing tone of voice and pitch offer many clues to the listeners. The stronger the teacher's own inner images are, the more easily will they be communicated to the children's imagination. Quite apart from this, language teaching experts have long come to consider it to be one of the characteristics of a good learner that he can happily accept the fact that he does not understand every single word of a context or story, and yet realises that he is able to understand the gist of it ("tolerance of ambiguity").

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It has proved very helpful for language teachers to keep a copybook for lesson preparation for each of one's classes. On the left-hand page we can write the things we are planning for the coming lesson, and we can use the opposite page for our review of the lesson in the afternoon or evening. We can ask ourselves questions like the following:

- Did I achieve a good balance among the various possible activities?
- What worked in my lesson this morning and what didn't?
- Which situations were problematic?
- How had these developed? How did I react?
- Which pupils didn't get enough attention?
- Did I pay more attention to certain children at the expense of others, the quiet or more reluctant ones?
- Were there any interruptions in the 'flow' of the lesson?
- What were these caused by?
- How can I prepare myself more effectively for such occurrences?
- Should I ask a colleague I trust to come to sit in on one of my lessons in order to get a more objective view of things? ⁵

⁵ In many British schools, *co-mentoring*, as it has come to be called, is now a common feature: Three colleagues agree to visit each other's lessons on a regular basis (at least once a term) focusing on different aspects every time and talking about their impressions afterwards.

This page also lends itself to regularly writing down short observations about individual pupils' involvement and progress, notes that will be of great help when it comes to reviewing the year's work and writing reports.

In addition to our day-to-day preparation we have to do regular long-term planning. The curriculum for Classes 1 to 3 (see below) offers detailed suggestions.

The Parents' Role *and* Writing and Reading 'Late'

It is very important that we involve the parents in what goes on in the foreign language lessons right from the very beginning. In Germany, foreign language learning usually starts after the autumn holidays, during the third month of the school year. Before this, at the first parents' evening, most colleagues will give the parents a "taste" of what their children are going to encounter in the language lessons. A finger-play, a singing-game, a song and perhaps a little story in the foreign language will create an atmosphere which allows the parents to experience the essence of what our lessons in the Lower School are all about.

On this occasion, it also makes sense for the language teacher to ask the parents very clearly not to interfere with what their children are learning at school, i.e. not to correct them if they reproduce something from their language lessons at home and there are mistakes in it. It is much better for the children to get these straightened out at school. Also, the parents should be reminded that, for the child, the new language is very closely linked to the school environment (their own classroom, the presence of their teacher and their classmates etc.). Asking a child to say things at home in the foreign language completely alone often leads to feelings of insecurity and sometimes even to downright refusal.

The parents should be told that they will have a chance to see little presentations from the various areas of learning – ranging from Main Lesson to eurythmy - that children usually take part once or twice a year.

*

Sometimes we are asked by parents why the written language is introduced as late as Class 4. The reasons for this are twofold: From a developmental perspective, the child passes through an important phase between his ninth and tenth year. He slowly begins to distance himself from his surroundings and to perceive people and objects around him in a new light. So this is the right time to introduce the written mode in foreign language teaching.

The other reason is to allow children the time to build up a large "treasure" of poems,

stories, etc. in the course of the first three classes, thus having at their disposal a suitable body of language and activities that can be used in the first steps of handling the written word. The next stage, from writing to reading, is immensely facilitated when the first texts that the children get to read are somewhat familiar.

It must be mentioned though that there has been a tendency in recent years for some schools to introduce the written mode in the latter part of Class 3. Especially when the foreign language uses written symbols unlike those of the children's native language, it makes sense to introduce the alphabet or the characters concerned in Class 3, so that the children can actually start to write at the beginning of Class 4.

In view of the fact that children's development has been accelerating in the last few decades, some schools find it justified to start writing in the last few months of Class 3. In many German Waldorf Schools, the foreign language teachers of Class 3 regularly arrange among themselves which language the class is going to start writing in first, and, with the consent of the class teacher, begin to write in *one* foreign language a few weeks before the summer holidays, which marks the end of the school year. The written mode in the second foreign language is then introduced at the beginning of Class 4. Thus, writing is gradually brought into use, and the children are not simply confronted with the "sight" of two new languages.

*

The recently published Waldorf School curriculum for English as a foreign language provides a good overview of the topics to be covered in each of the Lower School classes and the language skills that are aimed for at the end of each school year.¹

Class 1

Teaching Method

In their first year at school, the children absorb everything in a mood of wonder and empathy. The starting point of foreign language learning is choral speaking and singing, based on imitation. These activities are mostly accompanied by gestures and mimicry. As soon as possible, the children should be given opportunities to speak both in smaller groups and individually. Poetic language - rhythm and rhyme - forms one of the two main pillars in language learning. The other pillar is prose, everyday language, which is

¹ C. Jaffke/M. Rawson 2003: „Englisch“ in: Tobias Richter (Hg.) *Pädagogischer Auftrag und Unterrichtsziele. Vom Lehrplan der Waldorfschule*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, p. 146ff. [Translation: C. J.]

also cultivated right from the beginning.

Language games feature prominently throughout the Lower School. While participating in these, children are totally dedicated to the actions and the accompanying language activities.

Great importance is attached to story-telling. By listening attentively, the children learn to entrust themselves to the flow of the new language. Through this inner activity, they develop the ability to understand the gist of a story, something that plays an important part in language learning all the way through school.

By the end of Class 1, the great majority of the children should have mastered what has been dealt with in the course of the school year. This can only be achieved by thorough and frequent revision of what has been introduced and studied so that the children can continually practice anew what they have already learned.

Lesson Content

- Singing-games
- Verses and songs involving meaningful actions (e.g. “These are my eyes, and these are my toes ...”)
- Finger-plays
- Acting upon simple commands like, “Go to the blackboard!”, “Look out of the window!”
- Rhythmical and practical counting exercises (cardinal numbers)
- Naming parts of the body; daily activities (eating, washing, dressing); basic colours
- Elements of everyday speech that enable the children to participate in simple conversations, and short dialogues about their family, friends, pets, favourite foods, pastimes etc.
- Language games repeating individual structures or items of vocabulary (e.g. “Have you got ...?” “Is it ... ?”)
- Listening to and memorizing simple stories

Attainment Targets

By the end of Class 1, the children’s active vocabulary should include:

- The main colours
- The main objects in the classroom
- Parts of the body

- Days of the week, the months and seasons
- Numbers from 1 to 20

The children should also be able to respond to simple commands and basic questions.

Class 2

Teaching Method

A strong element of dualism is necessary during this year (question/answer, yes/no, you/I). The children have a stronger need to communicate than in Class 1. They respond best to authentic situations, such as having a visit from a native speaker in the lesson, baking or cooking from genuine recipes, etc. The teaching should have a strong rhythmical element in both the lesson structure and the nature of the activities, with strong contrasts between quietly becoming conscious of sounds, exact pronunciation, etc. and lively involvement. There should be a dynamic balance between being loud and quiet, speaking and listening. There also need to be many variations around common themes (e.g. an ever-increasing range of possible answers to a given question, such as “How do you get to school?”)

Lesson Content

- Activities from Class 1 to be continued and enlarged upon (e.g. poems, folk songs, objects in the classroom, commands, etc.)
- Rhythmical recitation of cardinal and ordinal numbers
- The twelve months and when children’s birthdays fall
- Vocabulary from the realm of natural features (mountain, river, tree, flower, moon, etc.)
- Articles of clothing
- Activities of daily routine (getting dressed, cooking, cleaning)
- Listening to simple stories, followed by acting out short scenes from these
- Talking about themselves (e.g. birthdays, age, family, pets)
- The forms of “to be” and “to do” in sentence forms (e.g. “I am the king”, “You are the queen”, “He is the prince”, “Where do you live?”)

Attainment Targets

By the end of Class 2 most children should

- know a range of nature (mountain, sun, moon, tree)

- know the cardinal numbers up to 100, ordinal numbers 1 to 10
- be able to respond to simple questions about themselves (e.g. “How old are you?” “When is your birthday?”, “What’s your mother’s name?”, “Have you got a brother?”)
- be able to use simple structures (e.g. “Is it ... ?”, “Where is ...?”, “Have you got ...?”, “I’d like ...”)
- be able to follow simple stories
- be able to point out/name different objects in the classroom
- know a number of songs, verses, and nursery-rhymes by heart

Class 3

Teaching Method

In their third year at school, the children’s growing understanding has to be taken into account and the children should be made more consciously aware of the use of language. They now have a much stronger feeling for language, for nuances of both pronunciation and meaning. They require longer, more varied texts to learn. They enjoy acting out humorous scenes and short plays that involve individual pupils learning roles and acting these out alone. This year also sees intensive preparation for the coming year and the introduction of literacy. Texts are learned that will later be written, key elements of grammar are rehearsed orally (singular and plural, personal and possessive pronouns, articles). Recitation is part of every lesson.

Lesson Content

- Dialogues and little conversations are more demanding now: Familiar topics are supplemented and new ones introduced. These include numbers, colours, places (town, village, country), forms of transport, times of day, the clock, clothes, food and drink, more complex commands, sayings and simple stories.
- Acting out and learning individual parts of a dramatized story
- Picture ‘dictations’ (e.g. “Draw a man with a red hat. His trousers are brown ... ”)
- Verb forms and tenses in sentence structures (in stories, see e.g. *The Pancake*, and poems with repetitive elements, such as “This is the Key of the Kingdom”)
- Main prepositions (e.g. in the room, on the table, under the chair etc.)
- Important question words like ‘who’, ‘how’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’

Attainment Targets

By the end of Class 3, most children should

- be familiar with basic items of food, clothing, furniture
 - be familiar with forms of transport, places and directions (on the left, to the right)
 - be familiar with times of the day (morning, evening etc.), clock times (hours, quarter hours, minutes)
 - be aware of the different genders
 - take a more active part orally (e.g. supply the next step of a story that the teacher is retelling)
 - apply structures that have been thoroughly practised more freely (transfer)
 - recognize the most common question words
 - be able to use the main spatial prepositions in context
 - recognize the main personal and possessive pronouns
-

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