

Meaningful Materials for Young Learners in a Digital Era:

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What do young learners need?

- Meaningful exposure to language in use
- Affective and cognitive engagement
- Enjoyment
- Motivation
- Esteem
- Opportunities for noticing
- Opportunities to use the language for communication
- Opportunities for interaction

Read (2015, p. xi) sums up young learner needs by stressing the importance of:

- ‘...rich exposure to language’
- ‘Opportunities for natural interaction and meaningful repetition in engaging contexts leading to creative outcomes.’

Tomlinson & Masuhara (2017, 246-247) stress the need for:

- Implicit learning through language experience both inside and outside the classroom.
- Learning holistically.
- The development of positive attitudes towards the target language and its acquisition.

What do young learners not need?

- Lectures on grammar
- Rules
- Controlled practice
- Tests

Which methodologies are ideal for young learners?

- TPR Plus
- Text-Driven Approaches
- CLIL
- Task-Based Approaches
- Discovery Approaches
- Extensive reading/listening/viewing

Which methodologies are not ideal for young learners?

- Presentation/Practice/Production (PPP)
- Translation

In six primary schools in the Lebanon Ghosn (2003) compared groups following a coursebook based course (n 78) and groups following a 'literature-based course' (n 85) (p. 293). She found that:

1 Interactions driven by the coursebook tended to:

- be focused on accuracy of form (e.g. when students used their own words instead of repeating those in the book teachers tended to correct them) ;
- be at word, phrase and sentence level;
- sound like drills;
- focus on content which learner will have already shared in their L1 ... or which is of no relevance to the lives of the students (e.g. coin collecting, caring for pets, gardening, the four seasons).

2 interactions stimulated by reading stories tended to:

- be 'interactive and often carried over several turns' (p, 298);
- include elaboration and clarification of responses;
- include student initiated language and content;
- include negotiation of meaning;
- show signs of 'high motivation level' with students 'eagerly waving their hands, bidding for turns' (p. 301).

Ghosn (e.g. 2013, 2016) has continued to investigate the effects of explicit and discrete teaching of language to young learners compared to the provision of rich and global experience of the language in meaningful use. She has found significant benefits for learners provided with experiential approaches in their ability to understand and use the language.

The value of digital materials

- Can increase exposure
- Can increase enjoyment
- Can increase opportunities for interaction
- Can increase time spent experiencing the language

The need for blending

Learners need blended materials:

- So as to gain from both the benefits of face to face learning and of digital learning
- So as to gain stimulus and support from a teacher

Conclusion

Most of the benefits I've claimed for an experiential approach for young learners are offered by the Palm project, especially:

- rich and meaningful exposure
- engagement
- choice
- opportunities for noticing
- opportunities for use

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Recommended Reading

- Bland, J. (Ed.). (2015). *Teaching English to young learners: Critical issues in language teaching with 3-12 year olds*. London: Bloomsbury.
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