

Teaching Young Learners

PRE-JUNIOR

A child's first exposure to English as a second language usually happens as the child begins primary school. Basically, we are looking at the age of six and maybe even five.

- Children at this age are enlarging their repertoire of behaviours. This gives them an opportunity to experience more of the world around them, which contributes enormously to a child's cognitive abilities.
- They are very, very active. Often exhibit hair-raising stunts (it tires them more to sit than to run around and play).
- Their fine motor skills are in the process of being refined. By the age of five hands, arm and body all move together under better command of the eye. They use their hands more. By six years old they can hold markers, crayons, pencils, they can cut, paste and build things. By seven years old, they prefer a pencil to a crayon in order to write.
- For those of you who are familiar with the work of Jean Piaget, we are looking at the pre-operational stage of development. This means that:
1) stable concepts are being formed = they can mentally represent something which isn't present e.g. draw a house or a car when it isn't in front of them **2)** mental reasoning is starting to emerge = they use primitive reasoning and want to know answers to all sorts of questions, this is the "why" stage...who was the mother when everybody was a baby? Why do leaves fall? Why does the sun shine? **3)** egocentrism begins strongly and then weakens (egocentrism = they believe that everybody sees the world through their eyes) **4)** magical beliefs are constructed **5)** they focus on one characteristic to the exclusion of others, for example can you be a girl and be Greek? Can you be their teacher and a mommy? This is called centration **6)** conservation... glass/liquid ...can't tell the difference till seven usually.
- They are able to act less impulsively and reflect more, for example not doing something to avoid getting into trouble.
- Memory: short term memory lasts 15-20 seconds with no rehearsal. Rehearsal of information is important in order to store it for longer.

- As far as “information processing” goes, if the components of a task are interesting and simple, children display greater cognitive maturity than said by Piaget.
- Now, let’s look at the child’s **social development**. According to Erikson, children of this age are dealing with two conflicting drives. That of initiative and that of guilt. It is at this age that they develop into social beings and realize that they are a person of their own. They want autonomy and want independence to try things out but also need their parents to survive. At times they might rebel and get into trouble, which may make them feel guilty. They see their parents as powerful, beautiful, unreasonable, disagreeable and even...dangerous. Their new found perceptual, motor, cognitive and language development makes it possible for them to make things happen. They have lots of energy and forget failure very quickly. For the first time, children become aware of their conscience. They take initiative and then they may experience fear of being found out or even self-criticism. If their initiative leads to disappointment it could lead to feelings of guilt. It is important to encourage initiative and not punish them for using their newly developed motor skills, not to consider their play silly or stupid or their questions a nuisance.

JUNIOR A AND B

We’re looking at the ages between seven and ten.

What should we know about children of these ages?

- Slow, consistent growth. Mostly skeletal, muscular and motor skill development. It’s the calm before the growth spurt of adolescence.
- They gain greater control over their bodies and can sit and attend for longer periods of time.
- Physical action is essential. They should be engaged in active as well as passive activities.
- Referring again to Piaget, these children are in the concrete operational thought stage. This means that they are able to classify things and see their interrelatedness. They can focus on more than one dimension and they need to interact with their environment.
- Their long-term memory increases.
- This is the stage of **INDUSTRY VS INFERIORITY**, according Erikson. There is a shift from previously defining their selves in accordance with

external characteristics they are now using their internal characteristics to define themselves. Industry refers to their interest of things, how they work, how they are made. I like to see them as little Robinson Crusoes, discovering things and focusing on all these little details. When they are asked to do something, their industry increases. When their exploration is seen as "naughty" they experience feelings of inferiority. Usually, when children succeed at something their feeling of industry increases and when they fail and get punished or scolded for it they feel inferior. This need not be the case. If our focus is on the process and not on the end result. Your role as a teacher is of utmost importance. Teachers have great influence; I don't think there is a person alive who has not been influenced by a teacher at some point in his/her life. It is important for teachers to be committed and above all sensitive when teaching these ages, in particular. We want them to enter the next stage of development with a sense of industry or capableness.

IN SUMMARY

Follow the children's pace, as Aristotle said, "knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind".

Try incorporate as much concrete, hands on experience as possible.

Promote a sense of industry rather than inferiority

Recognize special efforts and encourage special abilities.

Help children feel good about themselves.

Learn about the different ethnic groups present in your classroom.

In a nutshell, enthusiasm, ability to plan, poise, adaptability, warmth, flexibility, and awareness of individual differences.

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