
Learning through tasks and activities for young learners

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Using tasks and activities as the basis for language learning by young learners can help create a learning-centered environment. The key features of tasks for young learners have been summarized by Cameron (2001: 31). She writes that classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language:

- have coherence and unity for learners (from topic, activity and/or outcome)
- have meaning and purpose for learners
- have clear language learning goals
- have a beginning and end
- involve the learners actively

Cameron (2001: 21–22) argues that learning opportunities can be deliberately constructed by establishing an appropriate balance between demands on learners and support for learning, which is best achieved through teachers having clear language learning goals. She proposes a task framework through which such learning opportunities might be enhanced. The framework adopts the following three-stage format:

According to Cameron (2001: 32), the 'core activity' is central to the task and is set up through its language learning goals. Preparation activities help prepare learners to successfully complete the core activity, and may include the activation of key vocabulary. The 'follow up' builds on the successfully completed core activity and might involve an oral performance or written work based on language used in the core. As one task leads to another, the follow up of one task may be, or lead into, the preparation stage of the next. The advantage of this framework is that when implemented with clear language learning goals it provides the appropriate dynamic relationship between demands on learners and support for learning, creating an environment in which learning can occur. Having established my preferred teaching approach I am now able to consider how to evaluate the ability of teaching materials to meet its demands. Activities Reflecting the PPP-based approach, the activities in the Let's Go 1 textbook are designed for learners to practice or review language that has already been presented.

There is an appropriate balance of activity types and sufficient scope for individual, pair and group work. The activities allow for some individual creativity, but overall reflect the grammatical/structural approach taken as output is restricted to producing forms which have been specified in advance. While many activities are sufficiently challenging and engaging for young learners, some appear to be of little interest to six- or seven-year old learners. For example, an interview activity where learners repeatedly ask each other 'Do you like ___?' questions about pre-selected animals can, without adaptation, quickly descend into an almost robotic race to the finish. Such activities, as presented, do not engage the learners' interest or provide a sufficient linguistic or cognitive challenge. However, it is possible to adapt materials such as the flashcards, which come in small and large sizes, for use in more interesting and challenging activities.

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