Teaching Young Learners

Course Overview

Teachers of young learners are well aware of the privilege and responsibility that comes with being a child's first English teacher. The privilege is that of being able to harness the child's natural curiosity, vitality, and love of meaningful learning. The responsibility is that of making sure that the challenges of the classroom match –and keep pace with –the changing capacities of the students to deal with language.
This course is both an insightful reminder of what children can and can't do, and a collection of practical and child-friendly ideas and techniques that will help teachers to build an engaging and meaningful classroom learning environment for their young learners.

The course is mindful of the changing needs and abilities of young learners as they get older, and looks both at the questions of how children learn at different ages –and also what they learn. The role of the English teacher is defined not only as an instructor, but also as a guide. Children can learn grammar, vocabulary, reading and speaking, but they also learn about themselves and about the world, through stories, games and other classroom activities.

Whether you are new to teaching young learners, or an experienced practitioner in this age group, the course offers food for thought, practical resources, and an opportunity for reflection and discussion.

Course Modules

Module 1 - How Children Learn
Module 2 - What Children Learn
Module 3 - Classroom Management
Module 4 - The Power of Stories
Module 5 - Reading
Module 6 - Speaking

Module 1 - How Children Learn

Many assume that working with Young Learners (YLs) is about playing games and keeping them entertained, few appreciate the difficulties. This module raises the awareness of the challenges so that participants can be better equipped and able to evaluate what kind of activities are realistic for YLs in a foreign language. Through understanding different stages of development and learning, the teacher will be more able to adapt tasks so that they suit the needs of different age groups and needs of the children they work with.

Model aim:
To recognise how activities can help or hinder children's learning and to consider the level of support YLs require.

Key questions addressed:
- What do we know about how children learn?
- How do children learn most effectively at different ages?
- How can we support learners while promoting autonomy?

Module 2 - What Children Learn

This module aims to examine what we want children to learn in the classroom. It points out that YL teachers are doing more than teaching language: they are also equipping children with important skills, values and competencies. Here the language is a tool with which other important things can be taught and learned. The module suggests ways that language-learning activities can be exploited to teach children additional key skills, such as intercultural competence, citizenship, emotional self-regulation and wellbeing

Model aim:
To make the most of the wider learning affordances of the classroom with an approach which combines language-learning goals with life-skills learning goals.

Key questions addressed:
- What do children learn in the English class besides language?
- How can teachers guide children to develop their own sense of values?
- How can teachers help children to think for themselves?
- What are some opportunities to focus on lessons for life in the language classroom?

Module 3 - Classroom Management

The module aims first to look at what classroom management is by getting participants to explore their own beliefs about learners and the learning process, in order to raise their awareness of how these beliefs influence the way they manage their classroom. The next step is to identify three main principles for successful classroom management and then to look at how they can be put into practice. The module also highlights three practical activities that are beneficial in large and mixed-ability classes and also explores practical ways of making use of the shared language/L1.

Model aim:
To explore our own beliefs about learners and the learning process that influence our classroom management as well as look at practical strategies and techniques for a successful classroom management.

Key questions addressed:
- What do children and teachers need to maintain an optimal working environment?
- What are the main principles of effective classroom management?
- How can we manage large classes/mixed groups?
- What are the uses of the share language/L1?

Module 4 - The Power of Stories

In ELT children's stories can be a rich resource of accessible language, as well as a lively way to attract and hold learners' attention. The imaginary world of stories draws children in, while the interactive nature of stories generates a real sense of excitement and suspense. This means that stories can be used repeatedly, for different aims, without children getting bored. The image-rich, colourful and engaging nature of stories is a guaranteed attraction, and is also perfect for exploiting language. Stories also help children to learn different narrative styles, as well as to learn about the world around them through English. Stories can also cross cultures and languages, helping children enjoy a tradition which is as old as is that of human oral storytelling.

Model aim:
To illustrate the importance of stories as a teaching tool for language and other valuable competencies.

Key questions addressed:
- How can stories be used to teach language?
- How can narrative forms be used to teach language in a participatory way?
- Apart from language what can children learn from stories?
- How can children begin to create their own narratives?

Module 5 - Reading

The module aims to look at developing reading skills looking at the big picture first, starting from general conditions that are necessary to develop an inner curiosity or motivation towards reading in general. Next the module highlights ways to help children make a connection between spoken language, which they develop first, and written language. Then the module bridges these ideas by looking at the conditions for developing reading skills. The module explores ways of developing reading skills at word-level, sentence-level and text-level. The module also considers some ways of developing positive associations with reading.

Model aim:
To consider the conditions for successful reading, and to identify practical stages and activities for successful classroom reading activities.

Key questions addressed:
- How can children be helped to make the connection between spoken and written language?
- What are some conditions for developing reading skills?
- How can we help children develop reading skills?
- How can children develop positive associations with reading?

Module 6 - Speaking

The module aims to take a look at some of the key questions related to the process of helping children learn to speak in a foreign language. First we will consider the general needs of children in order to speak in class, followed by features of effective speaking activities. With the aid of several demonstrations we reflect on what makes speaking practice activities enjoyable and also consider what makes the feedback that the teacher gives effective. The module is built on reflective processes to enable participants to appreciate the power of their beliefs and thoughts on the performance of their learners.

Model aim:
To consider the conditions for successful speaking, and to identify practical stages and activities for successful classroom speaking activities.

Key questions addressed:
- What do children need in order to speak in class?
- What are the features of an effective speaking activity?
- How can speaking practice activities be made enjoyable?
- How can teachers give effective feedback on children's speaking?