

English in Pre-primary: *Wow! Fantastic! Arghh! Help!*

Sandie Mourão and Gail Ellis. 2020. *Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children*. Stuttgart: Delta Publishing. 251 pp. ISBN 9783125013995.

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A testament to its importance in the field of early language learning, *Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children* by Sandie Mourão and Gail Ellis is dedicated to “all those pre-primary educators and teachers of English who make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families”. The authors’ dedication reflects the book’s potential to empower educators and contribute to a more effective approach to English language learning in pre-primary education.

Following the approach which considers the “whole child”, the authors emphasise that all adults involved in pre-primary children’s education can work together to ensure that the children’s first early language learning experience is a positive one and paves the way for a lifelong journey into language learning. With that in mind, the authors divide the book into three main sections: Encounter, Engage, and Exploit.

The Encounter section presents the theory and rationale behind teaching English to pre-primary children (children from three to six years old). The very beginning poses the frequently asked question by stakeholders in early language learning, “Is younger better?” (8). Next is the Explaining chapter which clarifies common assumptions and provides definitions to establish a common understanding of the terms used. In addition to concepts and contexts, this section introduces the notion of the whole child, providing key theories in child development, such as Stage Theory, Constructivist Theory, and Sociocultural Theory with mention of key thinkers and their contributions in the field. It also introduces the notion of the playful child and the language learning child. This chapter also clarifies and tackles education, more precisely looking at six areas of learning and development within pre-primary education with a view to highlighting how English contributes to a child’s whole development and examining in what ways it contributes to children’s success. The six areas are personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; creative development. Section A, Encounter, ends with a collection of ten pedagogical principles which the authors consider essential to understand what constitutes effective teaching and learning when working with pre-primary children.

Section B, Engage, provides practical ideas and activities for the transformation of theory into practice. This is also the largest section of the book, comprising ten chapters (pp. 41–208). Each of the ten chapters includes a clear introduction which outlines the grounded theory that supports the activities; a “bridge section” focusing on the wider education of very young children (with considerations for different age groups, suggestions for collaboration, and questions to reflect on practice); and finally, a large selection of practical activities (starting in Chapter 3).

The first two chapters, “Getting Ready” and “Getting Started”, give practical suggestions for setting up and preparing English sessions, including getting to know your context, establishing objectives, handling available time and space, managing behaviour, and using puppets. The following eight chapters focus on English through various aspects which are briefly described. Chapter 3, titled “Songs, Chants, and Rhymes”, looks at the practical use of songs, chants and rhymes, with the aim of demonstrating how they can be used effectively. It also introduces “finger plays”, “singing games”, and music. Next is Chapter 4, “Games and Game-like Activities”, which emphasises their role in any pre-primary language programme, “for they are enjoyable, and the children associate this pleasure and enjoyment with English” (86). This chapter provides guidance on selecting, using, and sequencing games to facilitate children’s language learning. “Sharing Stories” is a chapter which focuses on the different stories that can be read, followed by very useful criteria on how to select, plan, and share stories in particular settings. There is a section in this chapter that introduces the story and then outlines specific activities. Three picturebooks and two traditional stories are given as examples. Children’s entry into the world of reading and writing is tackled in Chapter 6, titled “Early Literacy”. The chapter offers help on how to become aware of and how to support and contribute to children’s literacy development. In close connection with this is the chapter under the title “Numeracy” (Chapter 7) which draws attention to the natural and successful inclusion of maths and numeracy in English sessions. “Science and Technology” is the title of Chapter 8 and introduces children to the world of S&T and supports its careful inclusion in their language learning. Chapter 9, “Visual Arts”, helps in the selection, planning, and implementation of visual arts activities that generate meaningful language use. Finally, through Chapter 10, “Looking at Learning”, the reader is guided on how to collect evidence of learning and to integrate developmentally appropriate approaches.

Part C, Exploit, aims to encourage the reader to reflect on and question their views, beliefs, and practices. The activities are closely related to the ten principles presented in section A and underpin all the activities in Section B. These activities encourage both teachers and teacher trainees to reflect on their current and future teaching practices. Furthermore, this section is particularly valuable for teacher educators. It provides dynamic activities that can be used to introduce and explore key pedagogical principles. These activities stimulate reflection and personal development in trainee teachers. They also prompt reflection on how educators view children, how to offer effective encouragement, and how to integrate children’s home languages into the classroom. In addition to the step-by-step instructions, additional templates and complementary materials are downloadable from the Delta website.

Meeting the surge in interest in early language learning, Sandie Mourão and Gail Ellis, leading experts in the field of English language teaching, contribute a much-needed resource to the growing field. *Teaching English to Pre-Primary Children* is a comprehensive guide that empowers educators with the knowledge and practical tools to create positive first-time language learning experiences for young children. From establishing a strong foundation in theory to implementing engaging activities across various learning domains, this book offers a valuable resource for anyone involved in pre-primary English language education.