

# Give me 5 and make me feel ALIVE!

## *Five principles in foreign language education with young learners*

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### *Abstract*

This article states five principles teachers of young foreign language learners can pursue if they wish to make their language classrooms ALIVE: authenticity, lexical priming, integration, variation and engagement. Each of the five principles is fleshed out in the light of the current literature and research. Additionally, the principles are supplemented with practical teaching ideas and authentic learning examples produced by young learners of 6 – 12 years of age in primary and lower secondary school classrooms. Although the examples originate from English as foreign language classrooms, the principles can be applied in the teaching and learning of any foreign language.

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# Give me 5 and make me feel ALIVE!

## *Fünf Prinzipien für den Fremdsprachenunterricht mit jungen Lernern und Lernrinnen*

### *Zusammenfassung*

In diesem Artikel werden fünf Prinzipien vorgestellt, durch deren Anwendung Lehrkräfte ihren Fremdsprachenunterricht für junge Lerner und Lernerinnen lebendig gestalten können: Authentizität, Lexikalisches Priming, Integration von Sprache und Inhalt, Variation sowie aktives Miteinbeziehen. Jedes dieser fünf Prinzipien wird unter dem Blickwinkel der aktuellen Literatur und Forschung vorgestellt. Zusätzlich werden alle Prinzipien durch praktische Unterrichtsideen und authentische Lernergebnissen von 6-12jährigen Lernerinnen und Lernen aus Primar- und Sekundarschulen belegt. Obwohl die Beispiele aus dem Englischunterricht stammen, können die Prinzipien und Ideen in jedem beliebigen fremdsprachlichen Lernszenario angewendet werden.

### *Keywords:*

authenticity in FL education  
lexical priming  
integration of content and language  
variation and learning  
engagement

### *Schlüsselwörter:*

Authentizität im Fremdsprachenunterricht  
Lexikalisches Priming  
Integration von Inhalten und Sprache  
Variation und Lernen  
Miteinbeziehen

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## **1 Introduction**

Young learners are full of enthusiasm, curiosity and the natural desire to engage in anything they find interesting. If foreign language educators manage to make use of the children's natural instincts and intellectual and emotional dispositions, language acquisition will come spontaneously and nearly effortlessly. In order to achieve this, five principles should be pursued to make the language classroom "ALIVE" through Authenticity, Lexical priming, Integration, Variation and Engagement.

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Authenticity is seen in combination with the language of the real-world and a competence oriented approach that seeks to give the learners the means to act effectively in the foreign language in activities they would normally do according to their age. Lexical priming refers to the goal to help the learners notice how people are using words and phrases in context and to get to use them in their own language production without much conscious thinking of what they are doing. Integration and variation refer to the process of noticing words and phrases in many different situations integrated into the daily routine of the classroom and the playground. Embedded in many different content areas and situations as well as many different ways of using, a set of core words and phrases have to be used in the contexts in which the learners have heard them and with the meanings they have identified as belonging to them to create natural fluency and an age appropriate language awareness. Finally, engagement refers to aspects of motivation and the positive impact of situational interest on the learning processes.

Each principle will be fleshed out in the light of the current literature and research and supplemented with practical teaching and learning examples from primary classrooms with young learners of 6 – 12 years of age.

## 2 Authenticity and the real world of young learners

Young children come to our classrooms with a reasonably sound command of their family languages and with the ability to infer meaning without understanding everything they hear (Halliwell, 1992). Moreover, many children have already learnt to interpret meaning and to use limited language resources creatively through mixing or adapting language they have picked up because in most families the individual members speak various language varieties such as dialects or sociolects, sometimes even different languages. Thus, most families provide a plurilingual language environment and so do most playgrounds. The process of initial language acquisition in the family without formal instruction seems to be so familiar and well-remembered for young learners that their attitude towards new languages is usually positive, relaxed and unharmed. Teachers should thus make use of the children's lack of inhibition and fear rather than endangering it.

Children have playful minds. They like games and being active as well as making use of their imagination in make-believe play and in lively activities (Lovelock, 1996). In addition to plays and games, children take great pleasure in listening to stories, in making up their own and in creating imaginative worlds in role-play and unguided action (Corbett & Strong, 2011; Corbett & Strong, 2016). They use their body movements to become birds flapping around, sounds to imitate vehicles, take the roles of animals and act out weather or other sensations. Children often use sing-song to accompany their actions but also take great pleasure in repeating chants or songs they like many times (Cameron, 2010). The real-world of children is a playful one, full of creativity and imagination, and young children will learn in no other. Teaching and learning should therefore make use of this situation and reflect the preoperational disposition of young learners and their working towards the concrete stage which develops a growing ability to engage in symbolic play including interactive communication, problem-solving and more organised and rational thinking (Piaget, 1929; Piaget, 1951/1995; Piaget & Cook, 1952).

### 2.1 The authenticity of the primary school classroom

The concept of authenticity has been widely discussed in the literature about second language acquisition. While the focus was on the authenticity of spoken or written texts used in foreign language (FL) education in the beginning, it soon became obvious that the discussions were incomplete and lacking aspects of the classroom, which has its own authenticity. Although Taylor (1994) suggests that for the learners the classroom is a very real and authentic place and several other researchers support this stance in claiming that skill-getting (Rivers & Temperley, 1978, p. 4), pre-communicative activities (Littlewood, Teaching oral communication: a methodological framework, 1992, p. 44) or language-learning activities are authentic in themselves, Breen distinguishes four types of authenticity in the language classroom:

1. *the authenticity of the texts used as input data,*
2. *the authenticity of the learner's own interpretations of such texts,*
3. *the authenticity of the tasks conducive to language learning, and*
4. *the authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom."* (Breen, 1985, p. 68)

Young children often engage in parallel play, i.e. they may be playing in the same room with other children, but they play next to each other rather than together. They get immersed in their individual worlds and hardly communicate with each other because at the beginning of the preoperational phase their speech is still egocentric (Piaget & Cook, 1952). The main function of their utterances is to externalize their thinking rather than to engage in communicative interaction with siblings, peers, parents or caretakers. Moreover, very young children may not yet have grasped the social function of language because in most societies they will still be in the position of listeners rather than active communicators in interaction. As soon as the operational stage emerges, the children's disposition to engage in interactive talk develops rapidly. This has to be acknowledged when considering the authenticity of the primary school classroom and of FL learning at this level.

## 2.2 Authenticity of texts

Most authentic texts written for children of the same age as the target group are likely to be too difficult to comprehend for beginners of a new language. Therefore, teachers often make use of authentic children's books or materials that have originally been developed for younger children. For this reason pre-school materials are popular in many primary FL classrooms. Given the fact that these books and materials are frequently accompanied by text, the children become active readers of what is usually read aloud by parents or caretakers. Thus, reading is promoted from word to simple sentence level. Examples for material that can serve as language input and simultaneously be used to elicit simple stories are children's books like *Ketchup On Your Cornflakes?* (Sharratt, 2006), *Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly!* (Sharratt, 2006) or *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* (Emberley, 1992).

Through authentic text in children's books, learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) can be made familiar with chunks of language that are understood easily in combination with the images they come with. Moreover, learners can create their own visualisations of these chunks and thus become productive through drawing, speaking or even acting them out.

## 2.3 The learner's own interpretations of authentic texts

When children reproduce stories or animated image books, they can become communicative through mime, gesture as well as visualisation or verbalisation of their own ideas. Following the natural development of language acquisition, they primarily show understanding for input through mime, gesture or body language followed by single word answers and chunks while sentential response and discourse follow later on (Krashen S. D., 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1995).

Actions, images, collages or even written text the children produce themselves thus become authentic materials that can be used by teachers and learners in many ways. This creates ample opportunities for varied language production. The following examples show how children have developed their own interpretations of the questions found in *Ketchup On Your Cornflakes?* (Sharratt, 2006). These can be used in various communicative activities.

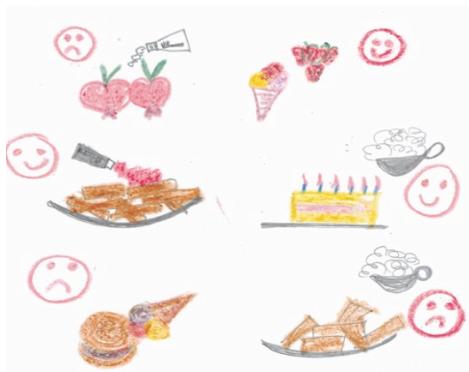


Fig. 1: Image 1, girl 1

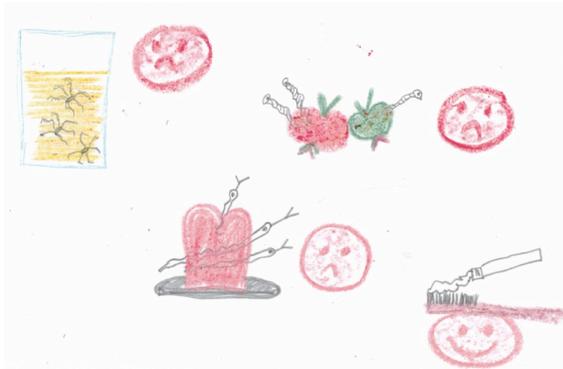


Fig. 2: Image 2, girl 1

After playing with the book many times and creating many different questions and answers which can be short (*Yes, No*) or long (*Yes, I like ketchup on my chips; No, I don't like ketchup on my cornflakes etc.*), the children can present their own creations saying *I like ....* or *I don't like....*. Moreover, they can respond to the following questions while looking at their peers' visualisations of what they like or what they don't like (see images 1 and 2): *Who likes...? Who doesn't like...? Do you like...? Why do you like...? Why don't you like...? How many children like...? What is yummy food? What is yuck food?*

Through creating their own interpretation of input through output, the learners create and personalise authentic learning materials. This can lead to collaborative engagement which results in higher motivation and in better retention rates than the use of less authentic or published resources (Leadbeater, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999). Creating authentic material in the classroom for later use in varying activities is a powerful tool in primary FL education. It creates interested and engaged learners.

## 2.4 Authenticity of tasks

As already mentioned, the kind of tasks young learners can relate to are playful, active and engaging. Children are good at pretending to be people, animals or even objects and they enjoy acting out their roles with or without props. In symbolic play of this kind young learners construct increasingly sophisticated representations of the world (Bornstein, 2007). Dressing up or only holding a gadget can transfer children into the imaginative worlds of fire fighters, police officers, princesses, tigers and lions or even objects travelling time and space. This acting out of roles aids language learning in that it creates situations which seem completely authentic to the learners leading to faster and more direct intake as a consequence (Blumenfeld, Kempler, & Krajcik, 2006; Lovelock, 1996).

As soon as egocentrism declines and children begin to enjoy the participation in games with other children, pretence and imagination become important. Inanimate objects such as toys and vehicles are given human feelings and in acting their emotions out the proponents become alive. Piaget (1929) suggests that for the preoperational child the world of nature is real in a way that its agents are conscious beings that have a purposeful task to fulfil.

During the first stage of animism, when the children are four or five years of age, they believe that almost everything is alive and has a purpose in the here and now. Five to seven year-olds only consider objects that move and have a purpose to be alive. Later on, they think that only objects moving spontaneously are living beings and only when they reach the age of 9 to 12, most children understand that only people, animals and plants are alive. This, and the possible variation in brain development of  $\pm 3$  years (Jensen, 1996), need to be taken into consideration in the selection of tasks, especially if they rely on input originally written for younger first language users of the authentic texts employed in FL lessons. Teachers need to be cautious in their selection of input because the learners may react negatively if the material or stories are strange to them and if they are required to operate in stages they have already finished. This is the reason why *Thomas the Train* may

no longer be an acceptable role to play for a 7 or 8 year-old child, while the *Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999) or *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969) may still be.

When the operational stage emerges and egocentrism declines, children begin to enjoy participating with peers in their play and games of pretence. This is when communication and rules become important. The latter play an essential role in the collaboration of children in the classroom. Thus, active communication between the learners and the teacher and among themselves opens up opportunities for new and more complex tasks than before.

Communication between the participants about and through spoken or written text which creates genuine ideas and meanings is considered authentic communication in the context of the classroom (van Lier, 1996). For example, surveys about movies the learners in a class like or do not like and information about how they feel while watching them can create authentic reading tasks when the children select the titles of films from a given list or when they search for titles in the target language on the internet. Moreover, watching very short extracts from movies the learners select in the target language can become important encounters with authentic text in a familiar context because most learners will be familiar with the content from watching the movies in their family languages. In increasingly multilingual classrooms it becomes more and more important to work with such authentic texts from the learners' real-world because their previous experience can foster comprehension. Teacher selected resources or course book material, on the other hand, might bring about input based on completely new material the learners cannot yet relate to. This would most certainly lead to overwhelming situations which should be avoided.

The following survey by an 11 year-old pupil is the result of small group work.

**V CINEMA & FAVOURITE MOVIES**

Name	Title	*Rating 6 is the highest	How does it make you feel? ... when you watch it
Tine	Frozen	*****	happy + sad (sometimes)
Miriam	E.T.	****	sad + scared + happy
Flo	Toy Story	*****	cool
Serkan	Nemo	****	good
Mona	Jalpari	*****	excited
Alinea	Dumbo	**	bored

Fig. 3: Survey about favourite films

With a collection of surveys of this kind from a whole class, there is plenty of authentic reading material the children can speak or even write about. Thus, the learners' own texts become the means for learning and the meaning making evolves in their usage to create new text in a larger context. Breen (1985) considers the authenticity of the task and its communicative potential for learning the most important aspects and concludes that authentic tasks should always include meta-communication. The above text and its task (see [Task 1](#), Appendix) produced meta-communication about films and the learners' own ideas about them.

The survey requires the children to ask questions like: *What films do you like? How many stars do you give it? How do you feel when you watch the film?*

In a follow up activity, the teacher makes the class present their findings which evolves in a conversation between the teacher and the individual learners. Conversations like this about authentic information from within the group are interesting for the learners because they want to know about their peers' answers. Moreover, they are models for discourse the learners are expected to engage in in pair or group work later on.

Example (transcript):

Tine: My favourite film is Frozen. It makes me happy and (...) sometimes (...) sad

Teacher: When (...) ah, when are you sad?

Tine: When Anna sings and wants her sister goes out (...) out from (...)

Teacher: Ahhhh, when she is locked in her room.

Tine: Yes.

Teacher: And the other members of your group? Which films do they like?

Tine: Miriam likes E.T. (German pronunciation) and it makes her happy, scared and a happy.

Teacher: And you?

Tine: You?

Teacher: Do **you** (emphasis) like E.T. as well?

Tine: I not watch it.

Teacher: Ah, I see. I liked it when I was a child. Any other film in your group **you** (emphasis) like?

Tine: Serkan likes Nemo and makes him feel (...) so (...) good. And I like Nemo (...) also.

Etc.

Conversations initiated and modelled by the teacher aim at leading the learners into turn taking and similar meta-communication about authentic information they have collected in their groups. Thus, the authenticity of the classroom as suggested by Taylor (1994), van Lier (1996; 1998), Breen (1985) and others comes into existence and provides valuable opportunities for an approach to the teaching and learning of FLs that focuses on conversational communication among learners and teachers rather than on course book materials (Thornbury, 2000). Initiation-response-feedback exchanges like the above, “can be regarded as a way of scaffolding instruction, a way of developing cognitive structures in the zone of proximal development, or a way of assisting learners to express themselves with maximum clarity” (van Lier, 2001, p. 96). Moreover, they are authentic input in the context of the group and an authentic classroom task. (Another example of meta-communication can be found in chapter 4 of this article.)

### 3 Lexical priming and the development of linguistic range in young learners

Working on what is important for the learners rather than on course material or any other pre-fabricated input ties in with how children (and adults) acquire and widen linguistic range according to the Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) and the more recent theory of Lexical Priming (Hoey, 2005). Michael Hoey emphasizes the role of real communication in fostering language learning that is engaging and motivating. Real communication, according to his theory, is driven by the desire to go beyond fact-based communication or simple information-exchange, and to communicate messages at an intellectual and emotional level. Both Lewis and Hoey call for materials and activities that help learners express opinions and attitudes from an early stage in the language learning process. This can only be achieved by making learners familiar with phrases that can add up to a rich collocational repertoire in the process of *lexical priming*, which is the potentially personal and unique process of adding new meaning to existing lexical knowledge as words and phrases are encountered and used in always new combinations. Hoey maintains that “[e]very word is primed for use in discourse as a result of the cumulative effects of an individual’s encounter with the word” (Hoey, 2005, p. 13) and primings are unique because of the “individual’s experience of language, and the primings that arise out of these experiences” (Hoey, 2005, p. 11).

In real life, natural encounters with language create reinforcement and extension of known words and phrases over time. A child may first encounter the word dog in combination with: *Look, a dog!* maybe followed later by *No, that’s dog food. Don’t!* etc. Each time, the word *dog* is encountered in new contexts it is primed in new word combinations. This unusually consolidates already acquired words but it can also crack word meanings if new primings show that the real meaning of the word is a different one.

At school, Hoey suggests, learners should be surrounded by authentic input that provides ample evidence for lexical primings to come into existence, and to get built up inductively and yet individually. Therefore, lexical range should be developed in a way that collocations and word associations are systematically supplemented in mind maps or concept maps, rather than in lists of isolated words disconnected from all their primings in traditional vocabulary books. Thus, language learning should be guided towards an individualized and strategic uptake of a wide lexical repertoire in order to encourage natural FL development through lexical notebooks (Mewald, *Lexical Range of Learners in Bilingual Schools in Lower Austria*, 2015). Consequently, explicit vocabulary instruction with the help of mind maps or concept maps that allow for gradual extension, constant revision and personalisation seems to be an important contribution to the success of early FL education, especially at primary level.

Communicative strategies supplemented with individualised and explicit vocabulary work through conscious and autonomous training of words and phrases in meaningful and contextualised lexical units enable

learners to become more fluent and creative in their production. In order to reach this goal, vocabulary items should be encountered and practised within real-life like contexts, using comprehensible but progressively authentic and accessible content. As already mentioned, games, role-play, songs, stories or playful activities are real-life like contexts for young learners. Knowing that *input* can only lead to *intake* if it is comprehensible, i.e. if it reflects the language level of each user, increasingly plurilingual classes constitute potentially difficult scenarios in this enterprise. Items that are chosen for explicit vocabulary work thus need to be relevant, appropriate, linked to their word families, collocations, alternative meanings, idiomatic expressions and more, to create new elements that can be connected to existing ones by the individual learner.

Conscious and autonomous training in connection with strategic personalisation is crucial because lexis that has already been primed in one's brain can only be added to and create a greater and more precise personal lexicon, if existing primings receive addition, reformulation or even correction and changes through new input.

This does not work through linear vocabulary lists, which are still frequently used in language classrooms. More creative solutions such as mind maps, text/dialogue frames, or flow diagrams etc. are necessary to achieve the goal of continuous and complementary (rather than purely additive) lexical development. They open up opportunities for personalisation through adding what is relevant and necessary for the individual learner over time instead of copying what is already printed in a course book and what does not allow for the personal touch which is especially helpful when it comes to remembering what needs to be learnt.

If what needs to be learnt is contextualised and personalised, the chance for intake is higher and the crucial motivation to become a lifelong learner of language(s) is much more likely to appear.

Digital resources and the element of fun play important roles in the attempt to personalise the material and to foster the motivation to practise regularly and frequently. Moreover, digital programmes or tutors can provide immediate diagnostic and instructive feedback, which are considered crucially important in learning.

Lexical notebooks have been compared to teaching someone to ride a bike (Dowling, 2004). Students need to be guided and feel secure before they are balanced and can pedal by themselves. Noticing language and writing down words, chunks, and fixed- or semi-fixed phrases is part of the learners' ways of becoming self-sufficient and autonomous. The more autonomous the learners become, the more likely it is that they will actually become lifelong language learners.

In order to remember vocabulary better, lexical notebooks should be organised in themes. These can be the same as the themes found in course books (e.g. describing places and landscapes, explaining an experiment...) or such that the students find important or interesting. Additionally, lexical notebooks can contain pages devoted to more pragmatic features such as adjectives, sentence starters, linking words etc. to "pimp" learners' work. Mind maps provide ample opportunities for creating collections of lexical items that can grow continuously.

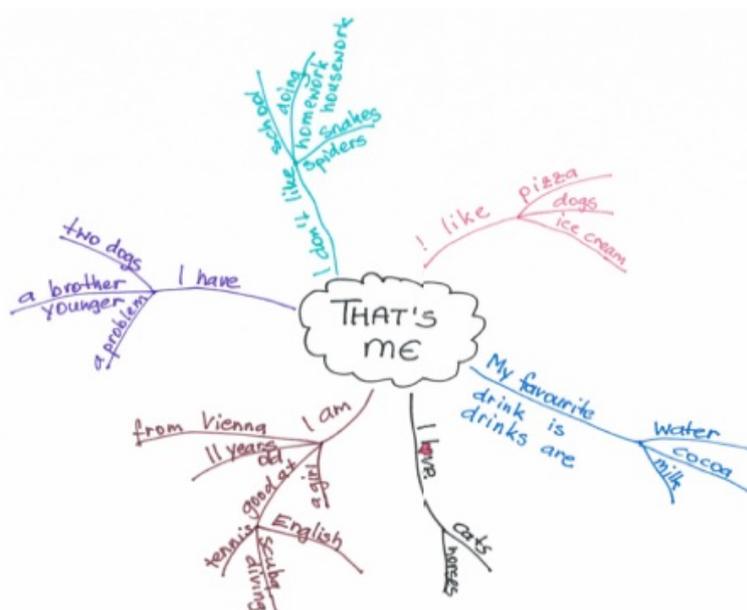


Fig. 4: Mind map "That's me"

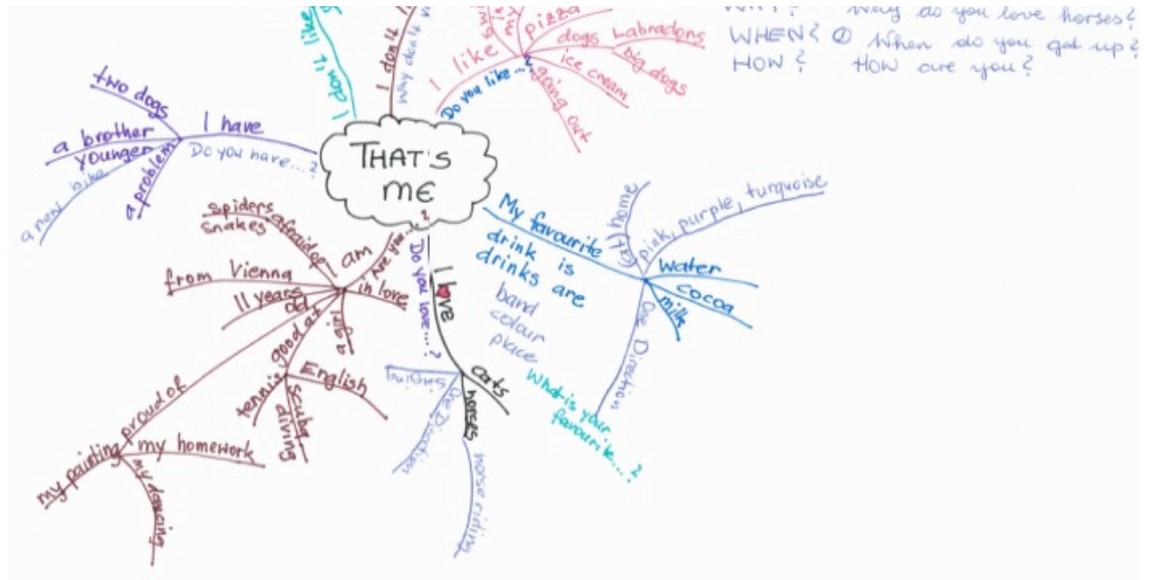


Fig. 5: Mind map "That's me", 2 years later

Examples like the above develop over several years and thus create more and more opportunities to speak or write starting from simple statements about likes and dislikes to interviews or discussions including question words. Phrasal verbs or verb-noun collocations can also become progressive charts in lexical notebooks.

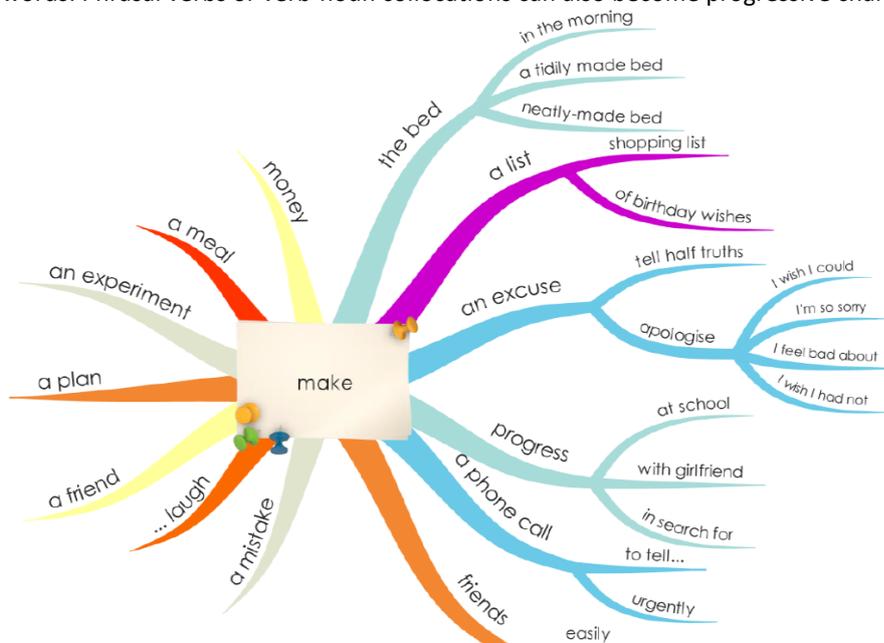


Fig. 6: Mind map "make"

Moreover, dialogue frames like the one below can be developed over time to help learners in their progression from initial simple turns to longer and more complex discourse.

**Questions**

**Answers**

What do you do at weekends?  
 ..... in your free time?

I play ....  
 go ....  
 paint / draw ...  
 watch ....  
 read ....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

I like .... playing ...  
 going ...  
 I love .... painting.... / drawing....  
 watching ...  
 I hate .... reading....  
 I enjoy ...

What's your hobby?  
 What are you interested in?

My hobby is | drawing  
 ... | .....  
 I'm interested | reading  
 in ... | .....  
 | soccer .....

How often do you .....?  
 Do you often...?

once a ... | day  
 twice a ... | week  
 three times | month  
 a...  
 every...

Where do you .....?

in a club  
 in the library  
 at home

What's your favourite .....?  
 Do you like...?

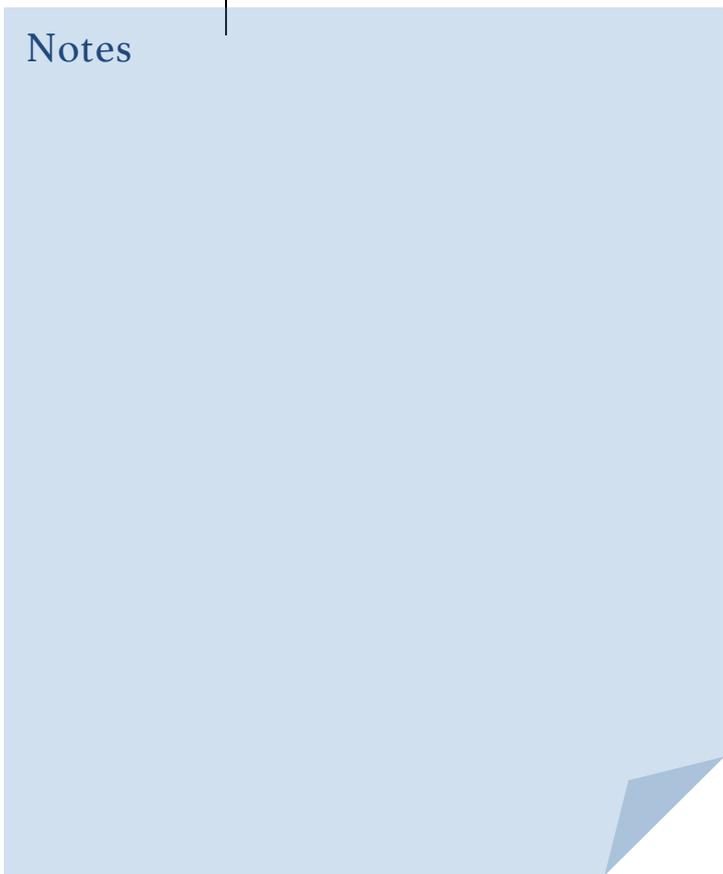
My favourite ..... is / are?  
 I like...  
 I don't like...  
 I hate ....

Can you...?

I can...  
 I cannot ... = I can't ....

Are you good at .....?

I'm really good at ...  
 I'm not so good at....



**Fig. 7:** Dialogue frame “Hobbies and Leisure”

Whatever framework or graphic organisers are being used, the important feature of any lexical notebook is the opportunity for making it unique according to one's own needs. Interests and goals develop and change over time and keeping lexis in a personal notebook creates a concentric approach of revisiting and recycling old and new features for better understanding, memorability, and sustainability.

In the process of creating lexical notebooks it is essential to give learners materials at the threshold of their competence as suggested by Krashen (1981) in order to make them feel at ease and for priming to take place. In the context of the primary classroom, the “silent” period has to be reconsidered as the «one in which the learner waits to be primed by others» (Hoey, 2005, p. 187). This gives even bigger importance to the notion of personalisation in vocabulary learning.

Very young learners therefore start with cutting out and colouring in rather than writing or drawing by themselves.

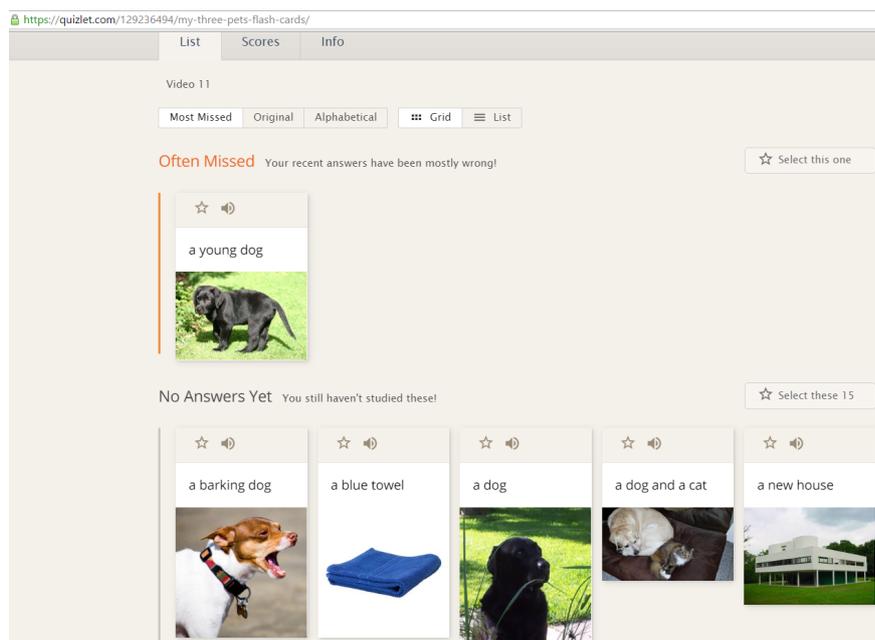


**Fig. 8:** Lexical notebook entry by a 5 year-old girl telling about likes and dislikes

As vocabulary acquisition is a highly individual process that can be made more effective and sustainable through strategic additions, reinforcement or correction of individual primings, the implementation of personalised and explicit training should become core elements of primary classrooms.

Teaching strategies that encourage explicit learning strategies in the learners' vocabulary acquisition process seem to be powerful aids in becoming better and more efficient language learners. The entry in Figure 8 can be used in its pictorial layout until the child can write the names of the fruits and the phrases *I like* and *I don't like*. When this has been achieved the teacher should direct the child back to this entry and encourage the child to write to it, possibly adding more fruits, vegetables or other food items (see [Appendix](#)). In a next cycle, the singular forms of the nouns could be added together with the phrase: *I would like....* Together with the phrases *Can I help you?* and *Here you are!* a shopping dialogue has evolved.

Moreover, on-line vocabulary programmes like "Quizlet" are valuable resources teachers can personalise to support their learners' linguistic range efficiently. Most programmes feature visual and linguistic representations of language to provide clues and instructive feedback to the learners as they are practising. Whether or not the solution chosen by the learner is correct or incorrect, the programme shows why it was correct or incorrect and provides formative feedback to the students according to the input the teacher or the programme has provided.



**Fig. 9:** Quizlet animals

Available at: <https://quizlet.com/129236494/my-three-pets-flash-cards/>

Digital tutoring together with concrete diagnostic feedback thus creates more effective learning outcomes which feed directly into increased communicative competence through a more elaborate lexical and grammatical range.

Graphic organisers such as spider webs, [dialogue frames or trees](#) (see Appendix) provide frameworks for many different occasions. Variation is important, also in the selection of the graphic representations of words and phrases in lexical notebooks.

## 4 Integration of language and content

According to Piaget's model of cognitive development, communication as the subject matter or communication about concrete content can only be introduced meaningfully from the beginning of the operational stage (Piaget & Cook, 1952). Since many early FL programmes start during the preoperational stage, teachers have to rely on methods that integrate language work into content studies in a way that the learners' cognitive development is scaffolded by age-appropriate strategies to make FL acquisition possible. These strategies have to rely heavily on subconscious uptake of language while engaging the learners in natural activities that involve them in play-like and motivating communication they carry out during their regular class work. Strategies that pursue the integration of the FL into the daily routine and in short digestible sequences reflect the learners' young age, their short concentration spans, and their need for constant revision. In Europe, the integrative approach to FL education became known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in 1994 (Marsh, 1994). CLIL has its roots in programmes focussing on content-based instruction and a communicative real-world approach to teaching and learning FLs.

While CLIL for young learners has recently been in the crossfire because of the lack of evidence that would confirm long-term positive effects that seem sufficient in relation to the financial and temporal input it requires (Andersun, McGougald, & Cuesta Medina, 2016), *“short-term performance outcomes may be surpassed by important intrapersonal and interpersonal effects reflecting longer-term processes”* (Mewald, Paradise Lost and Found: A Case Study of Content Based Foreign Language Education in Lower Austria. Unpublished PHD Thesis, 2004, p. 255 and p. 237). Moreover, taking an integrative approach seems to be the only meaningful way of managing FL input with very young learners. Their cognitive development in the preoperational and early operational stage does not provide them with the means needed to draw from abstract input or thinking.

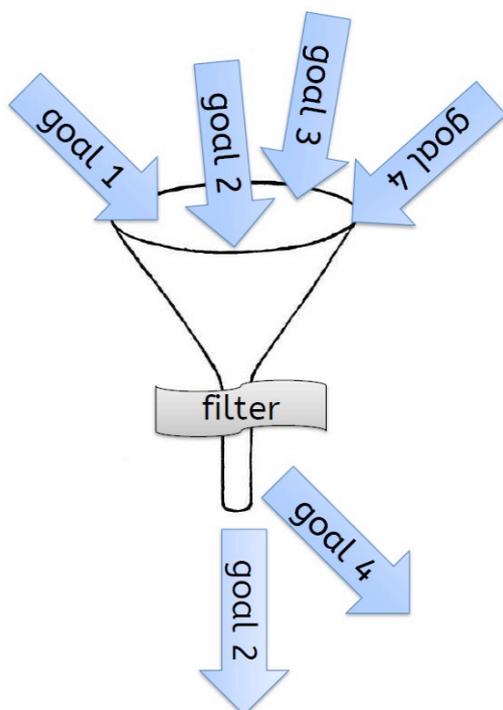
Instead, as suggested by Halliwell,

*"[I]anguage teaching should be concerned with real life. But it would be a great pity if we were so concerned to promote reality in the classroom that we forgot that the reality for children includes imagination and fantasy. The act of fantasising, of imagining, is very much an authentic part of being a child. (...) If we accept the role of the imagination in children's lives we can see that it provides another very powerful stimulus for real language use. We need to find ways of building on this factor in the language classroom too."* (Halliwell, 1992, p. 7)

Thus, teachers should seek for ample opportunities during the school day to integrate small digestible bits of the FL whenever possible. Linking new input and revisions to concepts already understood in the language of schooling (if it is understood sufficiently), increase the chance for comprehension and intake. As the latter can only be achieved if the input is comprehensible, primary school teachers are resourceful in scaffolding understanding through mime, gesture, and real objects.

For learners who are still struggling with the language of schooling, communication through the new language may be the only option to get interactive with peers because of the additional support they get in the shared language.

Integrative tasks range from simple counting, adding and subtracting of numbers to word games such as *I Spy With My Little Eye* or songs and chants. Action games like *Simon Says* or *What's the time Mr. Wolf?* are best played outside or in the gym. Integrating the FL in subject courses may reduce the number of factual goals a teacher can implement. However, the process of selecting goals that are sufficiently concrete to be understood in the FL and important enough for the learners to know them in more than one language may guide their teachers in their choices. Thus, CLIL becomes a filter in choosing goals and selecting those the learners should achieve sustainably.



**Fig. 10:** The filter function of CLIL

As many teachers and language assistants report that children are often overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of the content they are expected to comprehend (Mewald, 2004), creating a meaningful selection seems to be yet another opportunity to make any learning, not just the one that aims at language acquisition, more appropriate for young learners. This holds true for additional languages as well as for the language of schooling which should be given equal attention as the language dimension plays a fundamental role in the learning process in any subject (Beacco, Fleming, Goullier, Thürmann, & Vollmer, 2015).

## 5 Variation

Young learners need variation. Experienced and new teachers will know this alike. Short concentration spans, shifts in attention and distraction cause numerous problems in the classroom, especially with young learners. Ruff and Lawson (1990) suggest that attention varies with age and that older children have longer periods of attention than younger ones. This has implications already discussed in the previous section where an argument for the integration of short FL sequences throughout the whole school day was made.

In addition to short concentration spans teachers also fight the decline of memory retention in time, i.e. forgetting (Schacter, 2001). Thus, regular repetition in learning is needed to increase retention. If the repetition includes variation, new learning can be added to the repetition. In language acquisition, Hoey would call this priming. Learners need to have “*experience of a word in a variety of contexts*” and “[t]heir contexts are important in that without them the word will not appropriately primed” (Hoey, 2005: 10). The more primings, i.e. varying combinations, and the more variation in contexts the more solid and clearer our concept of a word. The importance of variation for learning is also emphasised by Marton who suggests that variation is a prerequisite for learning because “[n]ew meanings are appropriated through contrast and differences” (Marton, 2015, p. 64), i.e. through patterns of variation and invariance.

The practical implications of what we know about concentration spans, lexical priming and variation theory are that teachers have to seek for methods that give the learners ample opportunities to encounter new linguistic features in many different contexts and make sense of them through difference and similarity.

Variation in method or strategy is most probably the easier task for teachers. Making sure that constant repetitions supplemented by more meaningful variations of words or phrases occur regularly in FL lessons might be more challenging. It is indeed impossible if vocabulary is accumulated in traditional vocabulary books where lists of frequently isolated words do not provide any possibilities for making connections and new links when new collocations are encountered and should be recorded. Lexical notebooks seem to be better option because they encourage constant additions and provide reference if a learner’s memory needs revision.

Creating text from mind maps on a very simple basis as prompted through the example in Image 5 may be varied by adding adverbs to create *I really like* or *I hardly like* or by using linking words such as *and*, *because*, *but* etc. Such additions to texts create variations of initial production and provide meaningful practice of language structures in context. Moreover, later variation in sentence structure or tense creates activities that provide repetition at the same time (see [Appendix](#)).

Through varying the phrases not just in terms of their possible collocations (e.g. *interested in tennis*, *interested in going out...*) but also in terms of their colligations (e.g. *When I was 7 my favourite food was...; When I’m 25 I think my best friend will be...*) language development will spread over several years of learning and constant repetition in varying forms will create sustainable language competence.

## 6 Engagement as a sign of interest and motivation in young learners

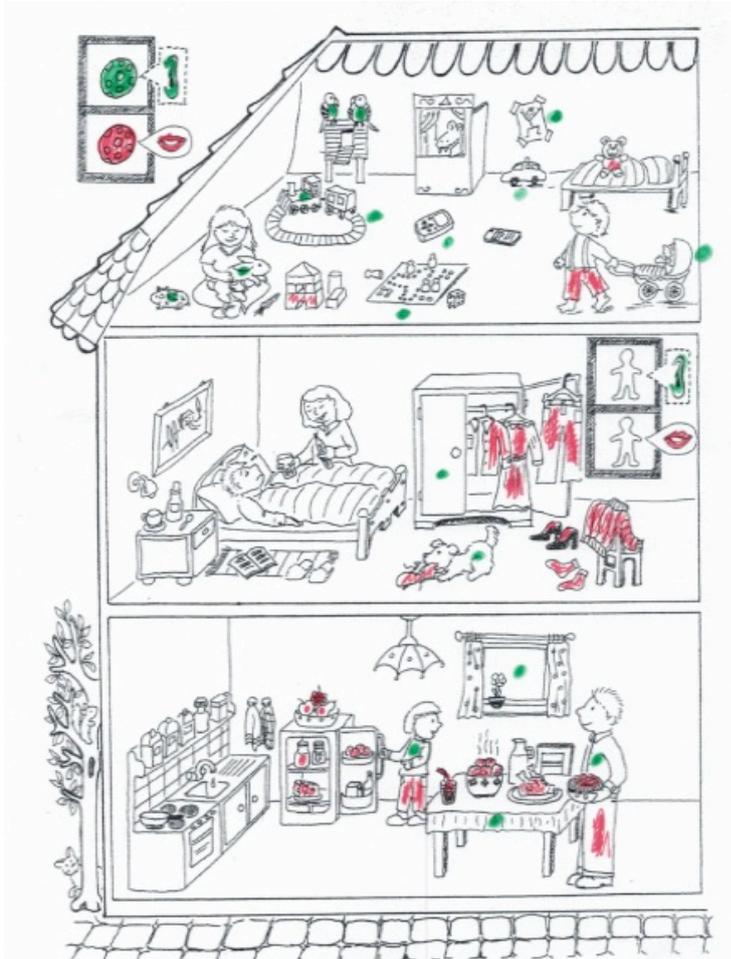
The last in the list of the five principles that make up ALIVE is engagement as a result of interest and motivation.

Children are generally considered intrinsically motivated and enthusiastic about language learning as long as their interest is spurred and the activities they are considered to carry out are playful and have a fun factor. Moreover, research suggests that the relationship between the teacher and the learners has strong impact on motivation (Vilke, 1982) and that motivation can be sustained over a long period of time if teaching reflects the children’s needs and interests.

Thus, language learning should be useful for the learners in the sense that they can make use of what has to be learned to talk with their peers about themselves. When teaching words associated with pets, they should be related to the pupils’ pets. Young learners like to tell stories about themselves, about their interests and feelings. Personalisation will result in motivation, increased effort and engagement.

Children also like to be praised and to receive feedback. However, the praise should refer to real achievement and the feedback should have a message. *Well done! Perfect! or Excellent!* alone will only create short-lived motivation. Real feedback that is understood and that gives the learners direction may be more challenging for the teacher to provide but it is more rewarding for the learners. To provide the learners with lots of feedback about their achievements self- and peer-assessment should be encouraged as early as possible.

Like in all the other domains young children will need models before they can engage in self- or peer-assessment. Early starting points can be achieved with the help of portfolios which can already be used before the children can read or write. The example below shows how a child has indicated which words they already say in red and which ones they can understand in green.



**Fig. 11:** Young learner's self- assessment of words they can understand (green) and produce (red). Source portfolio: (Schimek & Höltzer, 2013, p. 20)

Later on children learn to handle check-lists which can be used individually but also in peer-assessment. This includes feedback by a peer in addition to one's own estimate.

 <b>Me, my family and my friends</b>						
Skills		I can...	e.g.	a little	well	I still want to work on this:
Under- standing	Listening	understand when somebody greets me or says good-bye.	Good morning, children!			
		understand when somebody introduces his/her family or friends to me.	This is my mother.			
	Reading	read and understand a simple, short message on a postcard or invitation.	birthday greetings			
		read and understand a simple, short description of a person.	My name is Lisa. I am nine years old.			
Speaking	Spoken interaction	greet somebody and say good-bye in simple and short sentences.	Good bye, Mr Miller!			
		have a simple, short phone conversation.	This is Thomas. Can you come to my carnival party?			
	Spoken production	introduce myself and others in simple, short sentences.	My name is Peter. I live in ...			
		describe myself and others in simple, short sentences.	My friend Maria is 10 years old. She has brown hair.			
Writing	Writing	write a simple, short message on a postcard or an invitation.	an invitation to a party			
		write a simple and short description of a person using given pictures and words.	My name is Thomas. I have blue eyes.			

Fig. 12: Schimek & Höltzer, 2013, p. 40

Formative feedback through self- and peer-assessment is more frequent than any teacher feedback can ever be given because teachers are manging whole classes while a peer can always concentrate on their partner's achievement. Of course, peer-assessment cannot replace teacher feedback but it can contribute positively to motivation and engagement as it a constant stimulus if done correctly.

Still, the key to motivation for language learning seems to be active involvement in age appropriate activities that become increasingly interactive as the learners' cognitive development progresses.

## 7 Conclusion

Young learners have a natural desire to communicate and to engage in playful language activities. They come to the classroom with experience in making use of language they cannot comprehend completely and are ready to compromise in their own production when their lexical resources are not sufficient. Teachers who react sympathetically to their learners' needs and interests and who are able to create rapport are most likely able to motive their learners easily. If teachers manage to make the children interested and engaged, language acquisition will come spontaneously and nearly effortlessly. This can be achieved if the five principles presented in this chapter are pursued and if the language classroom becomes ALIVE through the use of authentic texts and tasks, lexical priming, the integration of content and language learning, frequent variation of motivating tasks and activities that create engagement.

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## Appendix

### Task 1

Instructions: Take a coloured slip of paper and write the title of your favourite movie on it. Then find the matching film genre in the list on the board. Write it below the film title.

Take a worksheet and ask five pupils about their favourite films. Write about yourself in the first line.



### CINEMA & FAVOURITE MOVIES

Name	Title	★ Rating 6 is the highest	How does it make you feel? ...when you watch it

Feelings: Fill in P for positive, N for negative and nothing for neutral feelings

afraid (...), angry (...), bored (...), calm (...), cheerful (...), curious (...), confused (...), embarrassed (...), entertained (...), excited (...), frightened (...), good (...), happy (...), hungry (...), joyful (...), sad (...), scared

## Dialogue Tree



## Worksheet

©Mewald/Wallner

Worksheet with space to add more pictures or text

**That's me: Variation of the mind map over time**

