

# Teaching English to Young Learners – Teaching with Minimal Resources

## Introduction

In this section of the course we are going to look at teaching young learners, but from the point of view of not having a world of endless resources available to us through the internet. Instead, we are going to look at how to teach when you have only a few resources available to you.

This may not be relevant to you now. In fact, it may seem a world away, especially if you are following this course by PC, with a broadband connection, which leaves you in constant contact with the world through Snapchat, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype or Facebook.

However, as you are exploring the wonderful world of internet TESOL, think about what you would do in your classroom if you had none of these technological devices or communication aids available to you. Actually, this is an easy question for any EFL teacher over 40. Because the most technical we got was trying to enlarge something on the overworked photocopier, and then clearing the resulting paper jam. But it is good practice to think about what we would do if we didn't have a world of resources available to us; hence the next question is about this.

### Question 8 (3 marks)

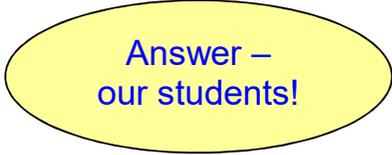
Imagine that you have just accepted a position teaching English as a Foreign Language in a developing country, where you will be volunteering for 3 months. Think of all the potential resources (including some of those that we have covered in this course) that are not likely to be available to you for your day to day teaching. In the answer booklet, make two lists. The first list is the resources you don't have access to. Then list the resources that you do have available to use. Which list is longer?

**Go to Answer Booklet, Question 8**

Question - what's  
the greatest  
resource in any  
classroom?

15 years ago we used to panic if the photocopier was broken – our meticulously planned lessons were bound to fall apart in front of us if we didn't have that vital handout. But what all TESOL teachers have to learn to do is to think on their feet, and there is nothing like losing the technology to bring out the best in you as a teacher. In fact, we can think of technology as a prop, which is only a small support for us to develop the greatest resources we have. So can you answer the question on the left?

The yellow box on the right should tell you what you already know, but if you don't, then it may come as a surprise. Indeed, it is amazing if you start a discussion in your staffroom, how many of your colleagues will wax lyrical on some great new interactive programme on the internet or the latest software developed to accompany a course book, when in reality the most fantastic, creative, complex resource is sitting right in front of us in the classroom. So in this first section, we are going to look at how we can use our students as our resource when we have no technical aids around us.



Yes, they sit in front of us, but we can actually use them as our main focus and resource in our lessons. Think about it for a minute. Every student in front of you brings a variety of attitudes and a range of different experiences to the classroom. Look at them – the clothes they are wearing, where they live, what they like to do in their free time, the food they eat – all are possible subjects for your lessons. So if we haven't got an overhead projector, course book or even a board and chalk, we can still have active, communicative lessons where students are learning.

Firstly, you'll want to get them communicating – both with you and with each other. You can do this in a number of ways – both with controlled and free practice activities. It can seem a little daunting at first – no course book (and hence no perceived safety net) but there are many alternatives and realistic opportunities for activities which use our students as the main lesson focus. In this section we'll look at some of the different opportunities we have. We'll focus first on speaking activities which require few or no materials. After this, we'll look at how we can practise the other skills.

## **Ideas for Activities with Young Learners**

In this section we'll look at seven ideas for activities that you can use with your young learners in age-appropriate lessons.

### **1. Discussion Groups**

As we have already seen on this course, young learners (from ages 5-11) are focused very much on the "here and now" – in other words what is directly in front of them or easily understandable – also on what they can relate to. So we can use this factor to our advantage, even when we don't have very many resources. So to encourage our young learners, you can choose topics or subjects that your students are likely to be interested in – related to their world. Perhaps even have them choose some of the discussion subjects. In this way you are letting your students set the agenda for the lesson – while you remain in charge and can control the learning input and output. If the topic chosen is relevant to their world outside their classroom, they are more likely to engage with it, participate more actively and open themselves to greater opportunities for learning. Also, you don't need a course book or props for discussion groups. It is simply you and your students.

## 2. Working with Imaginary Materials

What, no materials? Then just invent or imagine them. One thing that younger learners have over us older ones is the ability to use their imaginations. Here is an example: get students into pairs or groups and having them perform an activity, something which involves them buying or selling something. This could be something that is relevant to the country or lifestyle where you are teaching, or it could be a type of fantasy game, where what is being bought and sold is completely unrealistic – like a holiday to a different planet, or turning yourself into an animal.



Once you have agreed the scenario, set some pairs up as buyers and others as sellers. Have the sellers sit around the edge of the classroom (move the desks and tables if you can). The sellers are competing against one another and must try to sell their imaginary product as well as they can. The buyers have to walk around to each table and talk to all the sellers, asking them questions about their product – what does it do, why it is a good product etc. The teacher can also circulate, helping and assisting – encouraging students to think about the different products and express their preferences. The teacher can also monitor the time that the activity takes – encouraging all buyers to speak to all sellers within a set time frame.

Once they have spoken to all the sellers, the buyers have to make a choice of what they want to buy and from which seller. They then have to explain why they have chosen a particular product and give their reasons to the group. Once again, an opportunity for speaking and giving reasons for their choice, and an opportunity for the teacher to evaluate speech, make corrections or give assistance with new or difficult words.

This is a great way to get students interacting – it doesn't require any materials and all you need is some imagination and organisation. It gives the buyers an opportunity to practise asking questions and the sellers have to be imaginative with their answers. Both sets of students have to listen, understand and respond, therefore practising their English in a natural way. You can do this with most age groups and of course you can do it with a variety of levels too.

If you like this idea and want to see further activities, Scott Thornbury has detailed some popular TESOL activities for OneStopEnglish on the following web page:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59600&docid=146559>

Here you'll find consensus seeking activities, a favourite game of bluff and an example of the type of activity we have outlined above.

Now let's move on to the next of our six idea for activities with young learners...