

# **Being, Having, Doing**

**Penelope Williams**

**INTRODUCTION**

This article will look at how to teach English to 4-6 year olds. My hope is to encourage and inspire you as teachers to work with and relate to the children in your classes, by structuring what they learn and how they learn in a way that will transform and deepen their learning and connection to English and life. We will look at:

Who we are teaching – a humanistic outline of child development

What to teach – The developmental learning needed at this age: The curriculum

The essential needs of children – Restoring balance

How to structure lessons to meet those needs

Why teach English at this age

How to teach English

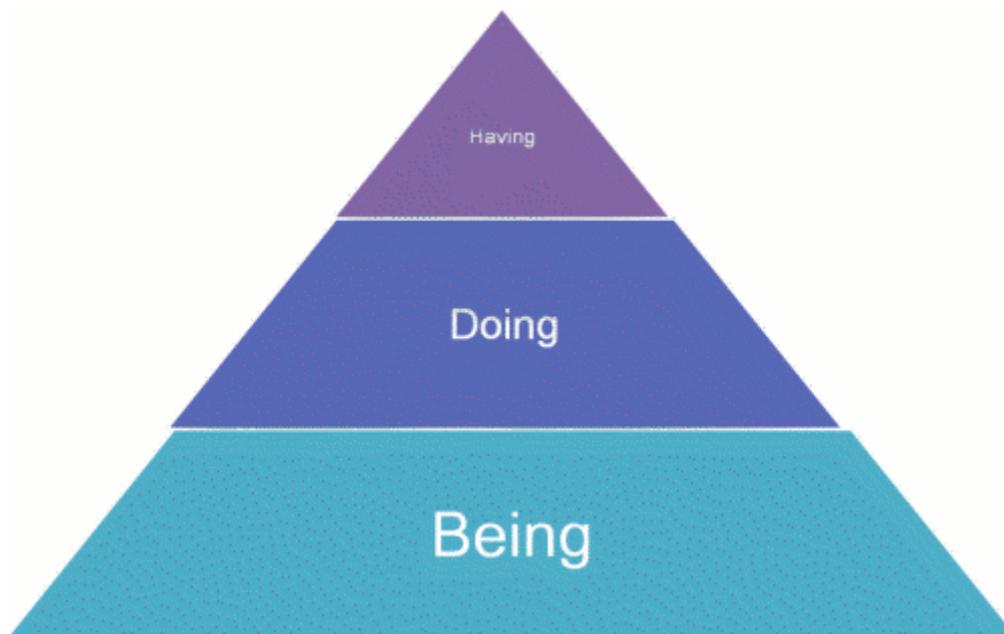
Voices from the teachers- Observations and Feedback

Conclusion

In the course of this article I will introduce various models. Models or frameworks serve as an aid to understanding; they are like looking down on the landscape from an aeroplane. The clarity of overview is very useful and can truthfully capture the essence and overall pattern of the landscape. Flying over England, the countryside is a patchwork of small fields. Seen from above these fields seem neatly bordered by hedges and trees. Remember, though, that on the ground those borders are not so neat and there are breaks and gaps in the hedges and fields may merge completely in places.

**WHO WE ARE TEACHING – A HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Humanism speaks of three stages: We begin with 'Being' and progress through 'Doing' to 'Having' (Rowan, 1983). For healthy development (growth and learning) it is essential that all three stages happen and in this sequence.



Throughout our lives we constantly recycle these stages on a micro and macro level. On the macro level, up until adulthood our development can be divided into three stages, each of about 7 years. In early childhood, in the first stage, the predominant mode is one of 'Being'. This moves into 'Doing' by the age of 7 and 'Having' (where thinking is the main mode of relating) in puberty.

'Being' has a special quality and particularly in these early years of childhood. It is a time of a more unconscious connection to the world – sometimes an almost dream-like consciousness. Because the focus is not on conscious awareness, the huge power of the unconscious (and creativity) is readily available. We live mostly in 'the now'. We absorb life and connect to it without barriers by sensing it and respond by naturally mirroring and imitating what is modelled for us in our surroundings.

The contrasts between this stage and the next mean that the methodology, aims and outcomes for this age group are not the same as in the following 'Doing' stage. ('Doing, which needs to follow 'Being', is more conscious. We are able to be more separate and aware and relate to life primarily through doing and through our actions.) An understanding of these fundamental developmental differences will inform why and how we teach.

**WHAT TO TEACH – THE DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING NEEDED AT THIS AGE**

“All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten.” (Robert Fulghum)

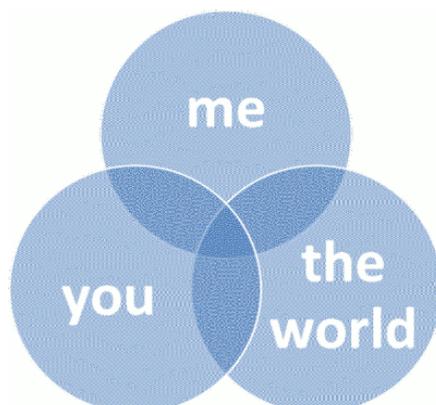
When we work with very young children, it is wonderfully clear what they need to learn and that is awareness - awareness about how to communicate and relate to:

Themselves – self, who they are, their bodies, how they function, daily routines, what they feel

Others – their family, other people, how to interact, play, share, respect

The world – this includes everything else that impacts on them from the bus that takes them to school to the weather, the moon, the supermarket, the festivals, etc

Put very simply, throughout life, we need constantly to relate to three things



Being aware and able to relate and integrate these three areas are the roots of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being - and these roots are best formed in early childhood.

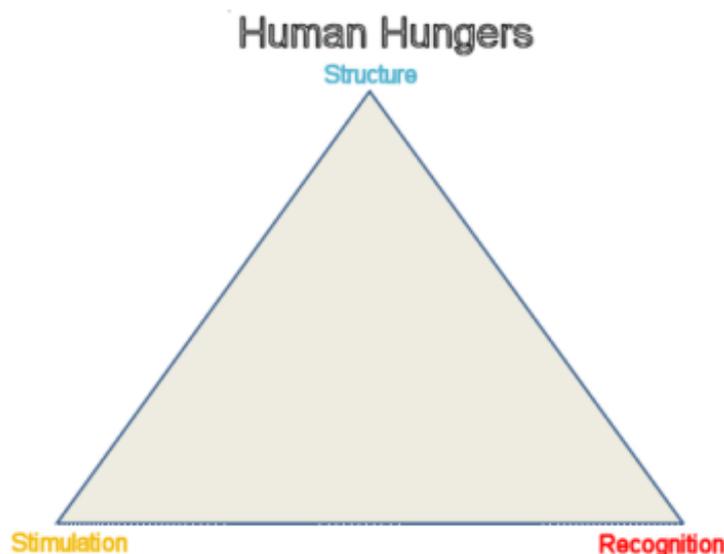
***The Curriculum – English at pre-primary***

“Me, You, The World” is the curriculum for English. The content and focus of English lessons needs to be helping the children to relate to themselves, others and the world and not language targets! “Me, You, The World” is at the core of the Catalan curriculum for infant teachers. Working alongside the children’s class teachers, we are teaching the subject ‘how to live’ through English.

Because teaching the curriculum in the mother tongue is very different from doing so in English, the rest of this article will look at how, by understanding what is really important for the children - their essential needs, we can structure our lessons to be skilful and effective teachers and so improve our skill and awareness of what we do, when we do it and how.

### THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN

I will begin by introducing a framework that is a tool for reflection and therefore also a tool for planning - as well as practice, evaluation and problem-solving! The framework presents the idea of Human Hungers. It is taken from Transactional Analysis and separates our basic human needs into three: Structure, Stimulation and Recognition. Three basic hungers drive us and need to be satisfied (whether we are children or adults!).



These three hungers relate and depend on each other and are constantly being balanced and that is why in the diagram above they are drawn as the points of an equilateral triangle

This triangle changes shape according to the balance at any one time.

### *Stimulation*

Stimulation is about contact: physical, emotional and intellectual. It is about feeling alive and energised. It is about interest and sometimes curiosity.

### How do we as teachers meet the children's needs for stimulation?

We can pay special attention to how the children connect with themselves, others (including you, the teacher) and the world (the topic):

Where the children are – in which part of the classroom, outside the room, in the corridor etc

Whether they sit (at the desk/on the floor), stand, lie, sit on the floor, in rows, in clusters, in a circle etc.

How they interact: individually, with themselves, with you, with the group; in pairs, in small groups, as a whole class, etc

What medium they use to interact: speaking, singing, drawing, painting, craftwork, movement, dance, puppetry, drama, etc.

### **Recognition**

Recognition is our need for life to have meaning. It is our need to value and to be valued - to be seen. When we feel recognised we feel stimulated from within. Initially, as young babies, stimulation and recognition are inseparable and we receive them through touch and through all our senses. Although they become distinguishable from one another, stimulation and recognition remain closely linked. Love, for example, is a high level of recognition and stimulation.

#### **How do we as teachers meet this need for recognition?**

We can pay special attention to value and meaning – what we value is what we give time to. The core of recognition is time and how we experience and manage time:

Recognition happens not just when we as teachers take the time to see, value and respect the children, but when we encourage and allow time for the children to give that recognition to each other.

Circle time, where each child that speaks is seen and listened to is wonderful for this.

When what children do relates to them personally they also experience a sense of recognition – e.g. letting them spend time drawing a picture of their own family, rather than using a flashcard to illustrate a family.

#### **Positive and negative recognition**

Teachers often think that positive recognition is just about praise. Praise is a part of recognition but a small part and one to be used carefully. It is equally recognising for us to notice any behaviour of a child – even to meet and deal with misbehaviour appropriately. The danger of too much praise is that children can stay seeking external recognition and will not develop intrinsic motivation, i.e. that they will be encouraged to do things to please (or displease!) the teacher and others rather than because they want to or because that is the way it is.

Recognition is so essential to life that the worst that can happen to us is not to be recognised: to feel ignored, invisible or unimportant. If this happens we will do anything to get recognition. Negative recognition (e.g. when we respond to a ‘naughty’ child with disapproval or anger), is also recognition of a sort and can feel better for that child than no recognition at all.

## Structure

Structure is our fundamental need for security and certainty. We all need a sense of security in order to be able to function well. Structure is at the top of the triangle because the purpose of structure is to enable and serve recognition and stimulation. This connection is very important: How we structure our lessons, how we structure our life is what will make it possible to have a positive and constructive balance of stimulation and recognition; equally, when we have good stimulation and recognition we feel secure and a sense of structure.

### How do we as teachers meet the children's needs for structure?

As with recognition, time and our experience of it, is at the heart of structure. Good structure comes from how we structure time. There are six ways in which we structure time. Five of them can be constructive and to achieve balance we need to integrate all of these:

Withdrawal ('time out'/no interaction)

Ritual

Pastiming (small talk, mindless activity, literally passing the time)

Activity

Intimacy

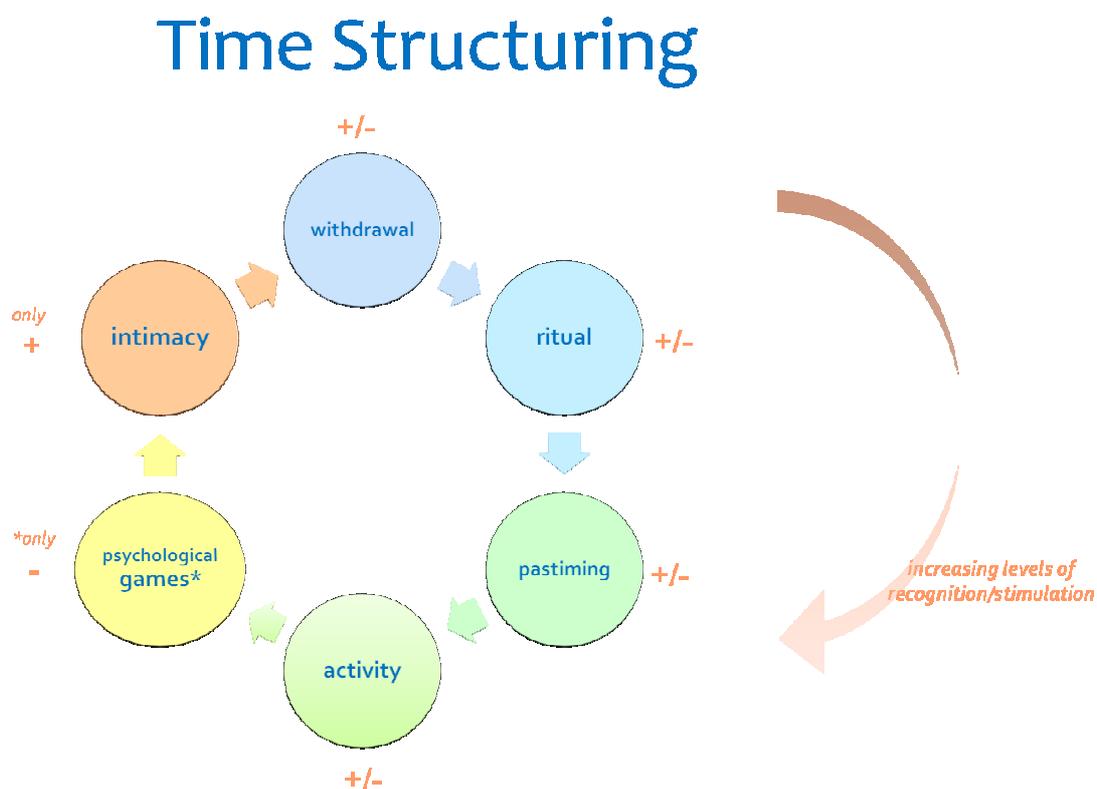
Psychological Games – Recognition happens not just when we as teachers take the time to see, value and respect the children, but when we encourage and allow time for the children to give that recognition to each other.

Games are never constructive but realistically often happen in the classroom. A Psychological Game – e.g. trying to annoy someone, being grumpy and bad-tempered, sulking - is when children or we as teachers are willing to manipulate situations to get negative recognition. Mostly, we do this out of awareness. Remember, negative recognition is better than no recognition. Being aware that these Psychological Games are a way of structuring time and of the basic needs for security, stimulation and recognition underpinning them, can enable us to see what is really happening and deal with it appropriately.

As integrating the ways of structuring time is what gives balance and flow to our lessons, the next section will look at this in more detail.

### HOW TO STRUCTURE LESSONS TO MEET THE CHILDREN'S NEEDS

The diagram below shows the six different ways there are to structure time, starting with withdrawal which gives the least amount of recognition and stimulation and moving round to intimacy which gives the most.



(Transactional Analysis, Eric Berne)

The '+' and '-' signs indicate whether our experience of time structured in this way can be positive or negative (i.e. that our sense of recognition and stimulation can be positive or negative). Notice, that Intimacy is only positive (+). Real Intimacy is always a positive experience and gives positive recognition and stimulation. Psychological Games, on the other hand, only give negative recognition to those taking part or caught up in them. Withdrawal, Ritual, Pastiming and Activity can be either positive or negative, depending on how, when and where - too much or too little, at the wrong time or in the wrong place can be experienced as negative.

To give an example of this: Withdrawal (no interaction) can be incredibly positive as a time to unconsciously process what has been learned – learned either unconsciously or consciously - and is closely connected to the capacity for intimacy. Often when we give children the chance to step back - to withdraw - they will engage all the more deeply afterwards and engage and work more effectively at an intimate level. This is the positive aspect of

appropriate and balanced Withdrawal that links with Intimacy. In the negative aspect, too much Withdrawal or Withdrawal in the wrong place can lead to isolation; too little can lead to stress and overload.

The table below explains each of these ways of structuring time in more detail and gives some examples and suggestions of practical applications within lessons.

TIME STRUCTURE	Description Example	Recommendation
<b>Withdrawal</b>  +/-	No interaction – in own world, day-dreaming – time for processing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Guided relaxation</i></li> <li>• <i>Processing time while drawing, playing, listening/singing songs quietly etc.</i></li> </ul>	Short periods of this can happen at any time when the focus is not too much on activity and participation.  Important to allow for and respect periods of non-interaction and time out
<b>Ritual</b>  +/-	Repetitive and highly structured interaction; can be almost unconscious  Ideal for beginnings, endings and transition points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Routines</i></li> <li>• <i>Procedures / songs / verses/chants / movements etc. to accompany welcomes, goodbyes, tidying up, story-time, eating, etc.</i></li> </ul>	Can also be where, when or how we do something: e.g. stories are always in the story corner at the end of the lesson.  Gives high level of safety, for this reason very important for young children. Allows them to stay in a 'Being' mode
<b>Pastiming</b>  +/-	Literally passing the time. E.g. 'Small talk'. Light hearted interactions which are unfocussed and require a low level of engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Small talk in L1 (e.g. children are walking to and from class or putting on their overalls/shoes etc. E.g. "These are my new shoes" "My dad's good at football")</i></li> <li>• <i>Chat in circle time/ after stories.</i></li> </ul>	Allow L1 small talk and repeat and respond in English.  Important to relax pace and loosen control to allow for this. Often it is an essential first step towards being able to intimately relate to each other and the subject
<b>Activity</b>  +/-	Conscious interaction – often, but not always, focussed on outcome. Demands that the children are engaged and participating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>work, worksheets, sport, non-creative play/games etc.</i></li> </ul>	The doing part of our classes.  Beware that lessons are not just activity! – Too much is too stimulating!

<p><b>Intimacy</b></p> <p>+</p>	<p>Interaction where creativity, spontaneity and deepest learning happen. Fully engaged and present with whole being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Listening/telling a special story, sharing feelings, whole-hearted immersion in drawing, singing etc.</i></li> <li>• <i>Real creativity and imaginative play</i></li> <li>• <i>Moments of wonder</i></li> <li>• <i>Circle time</i></li> </ul>	<p>Encourage emotional awareness and literacy.</p> <p>Remember all the wonders there are in life!</p> <p>Model being real with the children</p>
<p><b>Psychological</b></p> <p><b>“Games”</b></p> <p>-</p>	<p>Negative and unconscious manipulation of people and circumstances by children (or teachers!) coming from a longing and need for recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tantrums, sulking, etc. E.g. children grab puppet saying “Mine, mine...”</i></li> <li>• <i>Misbehaviour to get attention</i></li> </ul>	<p>Interactions which take a lot of energy and lead nowhere worthwhile. (We know them well!)</p> <p>Dealing with games appropriately is a good opportunity for classroom English.</p> <p>Teacher’s role is to ignore or challenge this as appropriate and empower children to get the sort of recognition that will really feed them. (A healthy classroom environment may be enough to do this)</p>

When deciding how to structure a lesson, the particular balance or combination of the five positive ways of structuring time that a child or a class will need is very individual. It is influenced by many other factors, like the day, the time of day, weather, the age of the children, what lesson or teacher the children had before, etc.

Some examples of how the combination will be influenced by other factors:

Age: P4 are different from P5. P4 are younger and more strongly in a state of 'Being' and more Ritual is appropriate as this gives children both safety and the space to just 'be

Situation: Children come back from a band performance for all the classes in the hall. They have been dancing and involved in a high level of Activity and possibly Intimacy and will now need less stimulation. This would be a good opportunity to encourage them to withdraw while they draw a picture about what they liked or saw (recognition)

### *Restoring balance*

The overall tendency today is towards too much external stimulation - and too little recognition. We are out of balance. We are constantly being entertained, occupied and stimulated. This is particularly true for children. Even young children watch large amounts of television and are exposed to a wide variety of multimedia. They are visually, auditorily and mentally stimulated in so many ways. Our lessons often mirror this trend. To restore balance we need a structure that focuses on recognition.

The different ways of structuring time lead to different dynamics. Incorporating all these dynamics - weaving together the different positive ways of structuring time, creates flow and balance in our lessons. So, to teach well and effectively, we need to include enough time for Withdrawal, Ritual, Pastiming and particularly Intimacy - alongside Activity. They are linked and interdependent on one another and each has a vital role. Powerful education integrates all of them.

It is interesting that traditionally, as teachers of English, our lesson plans (as well as teacher training and even course books) tend to focus mostly on Activity. Particularly for very young learners, it is vital we change this. In general, this means we as teachers need to reduce the 'Activity' in our lessons. "We are the time-starved generation" and time is what children often lack, time to 'be', quality time, for themselves, with others and with the world. Less is more in this case! If we focus less on Activity and 'activities' and more on the children relating to themselves and others, more learning will happen.

### WHY TEACH ENGLISH AT THIS AGE

As we have read, developmentally the 'Being' stage of childhood is different from the next and that is why learning English at this age is also different. The main reasons for 'teaching' English to 4 - 6 year old children are:

They learn unconsciously and assimilate naturally rather than being 'taught'

They pick up two important aspects of language that are much harder to acquire later: the music of the language (pronunciation, intonation, stress patterns etc) and what seems to be an innate sense of its grammar.

Young children are naturally uninhibited and creative communicators. Their exceptional ability to sense and imitate enables them to grasp the non-verbal aspects of communication (gesture, body language etc.) and integrate them.

They are still in the crucial phase of language acquisition and can learn a second/third language in a similar way to the way they learn their first language. This will include a 'silent period' of listening and processing before producing

Finally, on a global level, experiencing another language can and does broaden conceptual and human(e) awareness. (In bilingual Catalonia this is very clear!)

### HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH

As we have seen, 4–6 year olds need to start at a Being level and from there move to the Doing level. This is true whatever we are teaching them. Teaching language in a way that makes these children focus consciously (and artificially) on words, vocabulary, speaking etc, is both inappropriate and misplaced! - The 'Having' stage of language comes much, much later.

Because children learn unconsciously at this age and - like sponges - assimilate and imitate, we can and need to use English in as natural a way as possible to reap the benefits of all the points in the previous section. English is a language and, like all languages, is there for communication. Let us use it to communicate what the children need to hear and learn. The prevailing "Let's make English fun" mentality with its focus on Activity after Activity has the downside that as English teachers we are in real danger of becoming entertainers rather than educators. Let us learn from skilled infant teachers and work alongside or with them in a more holistic and productive way.

## CONCLUSION

This article is based on my work and research as a trainer, teacher and therapist. It is my extension and application of some of the basic principles of Humanistic Theory and Transactional Analysis and I have used particular examples from a course I ran in Catalonia in 2008. My aim has been to show how children will learn differently and better if we use English to communicate and model the really essential relational learning that needs to be happening at this age: relating to themselves, others and life.

The ideology of secondary education often influences how we teach language at primary and the danger is that we use this same methodology to teach very young learners. Although young children acquire language, unconsciously we can and do still work with the educational idea of learning language - of them 'having' knowledge, and so in our classrooms we 'do' activities in order to 'have' language. Particularly at pre-primary we can make a conscious and exciting shift away from this. Effective teaching is about 'being' in the language and living it.

Structuring time for more recognition and so meeting the children's real needs enables us to 'be' with the children in a very different way. This results in intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. Children become fully engaged and English is the means by which they experience and communicate.

I would like to thank all those teachers who participated in the Catalan courses of 2008 from whom I learned so much as well as the Catalan Ministry of Education for their far-sighted initiative in pioneering such work.

## REVIEWS BY THE TEACHERS WHO HAVE APPLIED THIS METHODOLOGY

In 2008 I was fortunate to have the opportunity of working with a group of around 70 Catalonian Infant Teachers. Over a period of more than four months I trained and supervised them in the application of the above methodology. This work took the form of intensive one week workshops and interim collaboration on tasks by email. It was an honour to be able to work so closely with such a great group of teachers and to be able to hear of and see some of the excellent teaching happening in Catalan schools.

What follows is a selection of observations made by some of the teachers who applied this methodology over a long enough period to assess its merits. These are short extracts taken from the many pages of feedback and communication I had from this committed and inspirational group of teachers – my hope is that these words will enliven and inform what I have written.

*All the reflection on our task has helped me to be aware of another side of our work and improve my performance. Important terms like "time for being", "recognition"... these were totally new for me! I have to admit that I was kind of shocked that I had never heard about them before because I think they are basic ingredients at the time of planning our sessions. So knowing about them has changed the way I teach and plan my classes. I feel more relaxed and secure now and I think my students are learning more and also enjoying the time in class more!*

*This afternoon I started my lesson with P5 talking about Christmas and showing flashcards (the tree, star, presents, Father Christmas....) and I've seen that children wanted to say a lot about Christmas, so I forgot all about planning and evaluation and I let them express themselves freely (...) now I do real "pastiming" in some of my classes. There was "pastiming" before, in my sessions, but not as today, when I decided to forget everything except pupils' interests. This way "pastiming" has become a part of my "plan".*

*Our best improvement was the "good morning song" which is a routine now: we sing the song and they have one minute to chat with a classmate, and then they are ready to start. I think that we've won in intimacy and it's easier to calm down the children.*

*Now that I speak slowly and quietly the class is also quiet and calm. When I start a story, children need to touch me, touch Ellie (the puppet) and the flashcards. Before the training course I felt so nervous that I didn't let them touch anything but now we spend five or ten minutes just being in contact with the material. Children are more satisfied and I can tell them the story in a more comfortable way. It's a minor thing but I feel proud of it.*

*Frequently, I think of your having said "A mistake is a gift to the class", "We are here to learn together", "Less is more", and I say it to myself consciously.*

*(I say to myself...)*

- *speak slowly and quietly.*
- *do more activities in pairs*
- *let the children act in the stories*
- *allow them to express themselves more freely*

*All these things have helped me focus my work from a different perspective*

*The first change I've noticed is the way the children behave in their English class. They didn't have bad behaviour before, but now they are more attentive and they follow the conversation closely. I suppose this happens because things we talk about and do relate more to their lives. They are also more interested in learning new words, and even when their parents meet them at the end of the day, they ask you quickly "what's \*\*\*\*\* in English?" to show their parents how they are learning English.*

*I think that I usually do everything too quickly, so I'm trying to do it slower. Before the training I was not sure if I was teaching English to infants in the right way - if you remember we haven't got a book so I only use songs, poems, puppets and flash cards with them. Now, I think that it's the correct way and I'm just patient and don't do so many things. Before we would always end the session really exited and always noisily! So now I begin the class with Withdrawal then we sing the songs slowly and quietly, I speak really quietly, not as loudly as I used to do, and we tell a story at the end of the class. All the class is calm and quiet and they are listening to me almost all the time. Some important changes I have made:*

- *I speak slowly and quietly.*
- *I don't use the cd player. I sing the songs and they enjoy it a lot.*
- *The children have to participate in all the activities, not only listen.*
- *I do more activities in pairs...*
- *I don't do so many things.*
- *The children are in a closed circle on the floor when I tell a story or sing a song.*
- *I let the children act out the stories.*
- *I let them express their feelings when we sing, or act...*

*I've already seen some changes in less attentive students. As we know, children who always pay attention are almost always involved in all activities, but what I've seen is that the ones who didn't get involved, now are more receptive and participative. They love being the centre of the activity. They join in happily and wait impatiently for their turn to speak. This has improved their level of oral English.*

*I'm really happy with these changes (focusing my teaching on recognition more than on motivation, because they are already motivated). I'm more confident in what I'm doing because I see their improvement.*

*I see they are more confident because of the routines (rituals). They don't get lost and this makes them learn more: they aren't afraid of trying, speaking or asking questions if they don't understand. They acquire the language in a natural way, unconsciously and in a quiet atmosphere. This gets in their minds little by little, to stay in their brains forever (I hope...).*

*All the changes I've made have had a very positive result. And I'm very proud of that.*

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND REFERENCES

Begun in the 1950's by Eric Berne, **Transactional Analysis** started as a form of individual and group therapy, and has continued to develop, long since branching into other fields, including business, organisation, consultancy and education. Humanistic in its essence, TA offers ways of looking at what goes on between and inside people (as well as ourselves) in order to effect and facilitate change.

The first book below is a general book on Transactional Analysis

Stewart, I & Joines, V.S. (1987) **TA Today** Nottingham: Lifespace Publishing

Fulghum, Robert (2004) **All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten** USA: Ballantine Books

John Rowan (1983) **The Reality Game – A Guide to Humanistic Counselling and Psychotherapy** Routledge