

Development of Communication Skills in EFL Kindergartens

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1. Introduction

First let us have an overview about learning in general, and learning second languages (L2s) by young learners (YLS) in particular. An overview of the literature written on this issue can also be of interest for those who intend to teach any second language in kindergartens. Later in this paper we will see how L2 acquisition takes place in kindergartens in two countries: Hungary and Croatia. The basic questions concerning L2 acquisition in kindergartens are:

- What teacher qualities are required in order to be able to really effectively deal with children of very young age in L2 kindergarten classes?
- How children aged 3;0 to 6;0 behave and interact while participating in group or sometimes off-task activities?
- What organizational techniques, methodological 'devices' are required to be able to facilitate YLS' L2 acquisition?

In this paper we want to find answers to these questions.

Speaking about learning in general, it is important to notice, that it is mainly about change, which contributes to a development of new skills, and in our case, speaking about children of very young age in particular, the formation of their attitudes towards the world, the new (kindergarten) sphere around them. As Magocsa (2008, 104) argues "The right interpretation of language symbols or codes is an essential part of the authentic knowledge of the target language. In kindergartens the whole system of the acquisition is based on this right interpretation of symbols and codes", which contributes a good deal to children's language development and shaping of new relations concerning different cultures.

Of course this formation is not an incidental one for them, and not natural as it happens e.g. with our appearance when we get older. Here a purposefully organized physical surrounding (the kindergarten class with all of its equipment) is involved and one or sometimes even two or three kindergarten L2 teachers, whose main aim is to introduce them into a new world, the parameters of which are rotated around a phenomenon, the name of which is English language. These children are involved to learn merely in a playful and 'magic' way, according to their expectations, attitudes and aptitudes, and cognitive development.

Learning L2 in their case, just like acquiring their mother tongue not long ago, is going on in an unconscious way, while experiencing the elements of the target language, both while listening to them and interacting, using (at least partly) of them in a well-organized surrounding and cosy, child-friendly atmosphere.

They might discover that some elements of L2 are exciting for them, some of them represent challenging features, and others trigger their curiosity towards the language, being acquired, and the people, who speak it as their mother tongue. In the case when they reach the stage, when they are eager to remember and understand, and recall L2 elements, we can speak about really effective motivation, and successful L2 learning. In the next part of this paper we will underpin by an overview of the literature the theoretical aspects which are provided for us by educational psychology dealing with children, learning second languages in kindergartens. For the L2 kindergarten teachers it is very important to relate what he/she is doing in an L2 kindergarten classroom to some educational theory in connection with second language acquisition.

A sound knowledge of children's psychology and their behavior can guarantee that in the kindergarten classroom both the L2 teacher and children feel a constructive atmosphere, where L2 learning can take place in an enjoyable and stress-free way. The L2 teachers (knowing exactly, what processes are going on in the minds of their pupils, what concerns, expectations, desires, etc. they have) are able to "optimize their learning through the provision of conditions that make it as easy a process as possible" (Reece and Walker, 2000. p. 69). In the following part of this paper we can see what literature says about effective L2 teachers, their methods, organizational techniques, disciplinary measures, and authentic behavior in the L2 kindergarten classes.

2. Teaching English from the teachers' point of view

2.1. An overview of the literature about L2 teachers' role and position in the process of acquiring L2 by children in kindergartens

There is not enough empirical research concerning how children behave with each other and their teachers while acting according to tasks which are appropriate to their age. Consequently, it is not easy to find really effective examples in the literature concerning this issue, i.e. how teachers can contribute to children's scaffolding while learning languages (Kriepka, 1999, Nikolov, 1999a). In the following part of this paper I attempt to highlight some important terms concerning teachers and teaching L2 to children of very young age. There are some terms which are to be understood properly while speaking about teachers and their position taken in the process of teaching very young learners (Nikolov & Curtain 2000; Moon & Nikolov 2000; Moon & Nikolov 2003; Moon &

Nikolov 2009; Nikolov, Djigunovic, Lundberg, Flanagan & Mattheoudakis 2007; Cameron 2001; Cameron 2003; Moon 2004; Phillips 1993; Pinter 2006; Reilly & Ward 1997; Vale & Feunteun 1995; Ellis & Morrow 2004; Curtain 2004; Ellis 1985; Rixon 1999; Read 2003; Read 2005; Carless 2002; Rixon 1992; House 1997; Brumfit 1991).

In the following part of this paper I will speak about these terms and will explain them in light of my readings, kindergarten classroom observations and personal experience that I gained while teaching English to children of very young age.

2.2. Creating positive attitudes to learning

Traditionally we can imagine the teacher as the only purveyor of information in the classroom, who is in the possession of all knowledge, and is ready to share it with the learners, who sit in the classroom at their desks, which are arranged in rows. Traditionally there is a blackboard behind the teacher, some chalk, as aids of passing information to learners. Children, aged 3:0 to 6:0 need a totally different teacher's behavior and organization of the activities. "If there is a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and teacher and pupils get on well together, then they will both feel more secure and learning is more likely to be encouraged" (Moon 2004, 44). Of course security and self-esteem are a need in any learning situation, just like in our case, when speaking about children of very young age. According to Moon (2004, 145) "all learners appreciate a physically attractive learning environment. Children are particularly sensitive to their environment because they learn through all their senses". He mentions most important elements of display which are to be arranged in a classroom purposefully in order to facilitate learning. Their function is to:

- a. Provide information or language input for pupils e.g. days of the week, numbers, or facts about a topic to stimulate children's interest such as a variety of clocks when teaching about time,
- b. Reinforce language learning taking place in the classroom e.g. an alphabet chart when learning the letters of the alphabet, words of a song you are teaching,
- c. Encourage high quality work by displaying pupils' work and showing it is valued,
- d. Act as a stimulus, for topic work, discussion or exploration of ideas,
- e. Stimulate pupils' interest or curiosity.

The educational context should fit the new circumstances (Nikolov 2000). Children of very young age should be motivated accordingly to their age, mentality and expectation. When all these factors are considered, we can speak about really effective motivation, which "involves arousal and maintenance of

curiosity and can ebb and flow as a result of such factors as learners' particular interest and the extent to which they feel personally involved in learning activities" (Ellis 2000, 76).

These children, who got used to acting in these situations, will not bear the constraints of sitting at the desks, which are arranged in rows. Teachers have to bear in their minds that children of very young age need group activities, sometimes prefer organizing their off task activities, or some of them may even not be in the classroom, where the big carpet is the main place of the happenings. They can play their computer games in another room, as they got accustomed with these games at home. In this situation it is of crucial importance that the EFL teacher provides possibilities and facilities to children, which are in close connection with learning the target language. For example, the games played on the computer should be in connection with L2, etc. In this case "incidental acquisition might in fact still involve some degree of conscious 'attention' to input" (Ellis 2000, 55). This acquisition is varied, according to children's IDs.

There are not any specific answers in the researches to EFL kindergarten teachers concerning the ways how children of very young age learn, and it causes not a bad effect on teaching, on the contrary. If there were specific guidelines concerning how L2 learning takes place, L2 teachers would probably be using the same techniques, regardless IDs and other differentiating factors, what would lead to teaching in the traditional way, the efficacy of which is questionable in our case. However, according to researchers, L2 learning is generally more effective if it is based on personal, direct experience. Concerning children of very young age, those concepts and L2 elements that can be accompanied by practical experiences are more likely to be acquired. It is also important to be aware of the fact, that " ...child notes the context in which the word is used, and formulates a hypothesis concerning the concept to which the word corresponds" (Scovel 1998, 97). To apply this method in a kindergarten classroom situation while EFL learning is taking place is more likely to be effective in the case when it is related to and conducted in the accumulated knowledge of the child's experience about the language.

It is important for EFL teachers in kindergartens to think about the following: how we, as L2 teachers might provide the experience which is related to English language in the way in which learning and L2 acquisition can take place as easily and quickly as possible. There might be two possible ways of designing a really effective L2 teaching program:

* A kindergarten L2 learning program in which the content of learning is elicited from an analysis of the children's personal, social and educational needs. This program is implemented by the EFL teacher in the way that, thanks to its well organized and controlled character, it is almost certain, that the language elements will be learned, and the first words will be uttered, which "represents a step into symbolic communication, and it signifies the start of the rapid

vocabulary growth with which thoughts, feelings, and perception, as well as other areas of linguistic development, are framed" (Scovel 1998, 13). It can also be detected exactly when acquisition has taken place. According to this method of providing the needed experience about L2 to children, motivation can be traced on in parallel with immediate success of taking part in L2 interactions and related activities. The avoidance of possible failure is an important constituent of this approach.

This happens in EFL kindergartens quite often, as children at this age need to be guided while learning. They place themselves in the hands of the EFL teacher, just like they do at home as far as their caretakers are concerned. This complies with their expectation concerning safe home atmosphere in the kindergarten. Thanks to this approach, a relationship of dependency of the children on their EFL teacher tends to develop. It is not only evident, but a need for them that L2 related activities are organized by their teacher, who is the controller of the activities as well. In this situation, the EFL teacher should choose a 'behavioral' teaching technique (Ellis 2000, 77), which can be e.g. repeating (if needed almost endlessly) some new words together in order to better remember them, and be able to recall them when it is needed in the L2 interaction. Remembering new lexical elements can be facilitated by singing songs, repeating simple poems, chants, etc., which can contribute to the development of children's shared attention span (Büki, Egyed & Pléh 1984, 103). The importance of organizing activities and games is also mentioned, which are not necessarily based on L2 elements, however, contain some of them.

* These children like experiencing L2 related elements on their own as well, and they can do all of it in the case when the EFL teacher provides them this opportunity. "The same instructional option is not equally effective to all L2 learners. Individual differences to do with such factors as learning style and language aptitude are likely to influence which options work best" (Ellis 2000, 86). They can do it while being engaged in their off task activities, apart from their mates, who are taking part in the games played on the big carpet in the middle of the classroom. A careful planning of the activities should make these activities a part of the learning program. The activities and learning programs should be planned in the way that they satisfy the learning needs of every single child in the group, and as a result, these "learners with differing kinds of ability may be able to achieve similar levels of success, providing that the type of instruction enables them to maximize their strengths" (Ellis 2000, 86). Such a program, in which learners themselves identify and accept a need to learn an L2. This approach can be described as 'self-organized learning', 'learner-centered learning', 'participative learning', and 'off task learning'.

A discussion with the children to be taught is also important. As Scovel says, "Children, quite naturally, want to talk about what surrounds them; at life's beginnings they are the center of their universe. If the child cannot manipulate the

object during this early period of physical development, it does not appear to be worth naming" (Scovel 1998, 12). Of course these elements of the surrounding of their kindergarten class will be in the center of the discussion about the activities to be chosen. In this debate, children can reveal what the experience has taught them concerning L2 elements, and also gives them a possibility to decide upon activities, which can contribute to further development of their L2, and their playful participation in the games. After all these can follow the EFL teacher's 'form-based instruction' (Ellis 2000, 85), where the input processing is emphasized, and in this way attracts attention, possibly all of the children in the kindergarten classroom.

In the FEU (1981) document there were suggested principles of lesson design, which can be of use in the case of dealing with children of very young age in the L2 kindergartens as well. It is called the *experience, reflection, learning model*, which contain the following principles:

- a. the process should be concentrated on the student's current experience,
- b. it takes into consideration the real nature of the learner by paying attention to the elements what have been learned already, and
- c. really successful learning can take place in a variety of contexts.

According to the mentioned document and its suggestion, the learning process (in our case the learning of L2) consists of three phases. First, it is important that children's L2 related *experience* needs to be followed by some organized (both by the teacher and the children themselves) *reflections*. Thanks to this reflection it becomes evident that children learn from their L2 experience, and it becomes easier to identify any need (common or individual) for some specific L2 learning before further L2 experience can be got.

Almost all of the EFL kindergarten teachers are aware of the importance of providing the above mentioned experience to the children while organizing group activities for them. However, the activity, which is designed to consolidate the L2 acquisition and to ensure that all of the L2 learning opportunities have really taken place, in most of the cases is missing from the program.

Experience usually is a part of the L2 learning process. In this case *reflection* concerning certain L2 elements can take part on the big carpet, where the activities take place, or in one corner of the classroom, where two or three children are engaged with their off task behavior (Bakhtin 1981; Bakhtin 1984). The role of the EFL kindergarten teacher is to facilitate L2 reflections and elicit more and more L2 elements, interactions, perceptions and views concerning the target language and culture from the children. In this process they will learn not only from the EFL teacher's utterances, but from each other's as well. All these can be effective in case there is a well-chosen balance, from the side of the EFL teacher, of listening passively to what has been uttered in the target language and interference, when it is considered necessary concerning some L2 elements to be re-shaped, for example.

We can see that the L2 teaching process is subdivided into four elements, which give quite a clear picture about appropriate concepts of the L2 teaching process. A significant part of the process of acquisition is reminding children of language work they have already completed, and language segments they have already met and used in order to facilitate comprehension and L2 production (Tannen 1989, 48). If L2 kindergarten teachers are aware of this process, they are able to plan and carry out really effective L2 learning sequence. First, it is important to determine what children should be able to communicate and understand while listening to L2 interactions when they have completed a segment of instruction, which is embedded into games and other (mainly) group activities. These objectives can vary in scope and character. They can contain very simple elements of the language to be acquired (lexemes) or much more specific ones, e.g. some syntactical elements, like question forms, asking for information, etc. It is very important to determine what we want our children to acquire first in the sequence of teaching. In this way, we can have a clear picture about where we intend our children to take, and in this way it is more likely that we can really take them there when we go to the end of the sequence.

It is important to bear in mind which L2 elements children have learned and/or acquired. Their age differences, and consequently intellectual abilities, personal cognitive development, L2 learning motivational state and learning abilities in general are factors that the EFL teacher has to bear in mind while organizing and carrying out any kind of L2 related activities. The instructional techniques applied by the EFL teacher should be chosen according to the learning situation, described above, bearing in mind the PPP approach, which was suggested by Ellis (1993), and which consists of Presentation, Practice, and further/free Practice. Finally, the assessment (in our case the EFL teacher's remarks concerning the learning behavior of the children) may indicate that all children or sometimes only some of them have fallen short of their objectives, and could not acquire the L2 elements at the required level. It indicates that one or some of the previous teaching techniques or organizational elements may need adjustment according to the real need of every single child, who is participating in task oriented or off task activities.

Considering the above described segments and elements of learning the EFL teachers can easily establish a positive attitude towards the language to be acquired and towards learning as well, in the case when all the mentioned elements and segments are embedded in playful, relaxed atmosphere. The so called optional subject phenomenon, henceforth the OSP (Hyams 1986; Radford 1986; O'Grady, Peters & Masterson 1989), plays a significant role in the early stage of children's multi-word combination, because there are plenty of options to be considered while organizing the L2 related activities, like games, singing together, etc. In order to be motivated to learn while playing different games or listening to rhymes and songs, etc., children have to be highly interested

in their listening, dancing, acting out, or playing activities, in the focus of which is L2. One of the best ways to motivate children is to provide a wide scale of activities and ensure that the activities will not last more than the children's attention span can allow. This attention span depends on the type of activities and varies a great deal.

The extent of variety is determined by the direct experiment of children and the subsequent reflection to the activities. For example, when children's L2 development is in the one-word stage, it has been researched and found out that children encode new rather than given information (Greenfield 1978; Hornby & Hass 1970; Weiman 1976; MacWhinney & Bates 1978). Consequently, emphasis should be put on giving children aged 3-6 consistently new information as early as the telegraphic period (Hupet & Tilmant 1989). The EFL teachers need to know exactly where he/she is going, i.e., what elements of language should the children deal with, and in this way it is possible to focus L2 learning on the real needs of the children. In this way the L2 teacher is able to ensure that the level of utterances, and consequently the level of learning, is neither too low nor too high. The language elements embedded in the interactions should always be easily accessible and understood from the situation in which they take place.

By considering all these aspects, L2 teachers can provide the needed positive L2 learning atmosphere and environment. If this atmosphere is not created, children become bored, their attention span drastically decreases, and more and more of them will try to organize their off task activities in the hope to get more enjoyment while being engaged in them. It is sure, that they will not reach their full L2 learning potential in this case, they will not devote any more time to the activities and consequently L2 learning, and they will try to escape from the situation, which is becoming more and more unpleasant for them.

2.3. Individual learning needs and children's expectations

Children prefer being engaged in self-organized off task activities, where regulations depend on their judgments and decisions. A third child may prefer getting experience while participating in group activities and feels secure because the EFL teacher has organized the game. An interesting study by Nikolov (1999b) shows that children of very young age like learning the language because the activities are enjoyable and the atmosphere is very positive in the classroom. According to Nikolov, at this age extrinsic factors are dominant. Sometimes competing is the spurring factor in these activities, which facilitates L2 learning as well. While competing in an organized activity, the child is using the cognitive capacity he/she has, which is in close connection with their speech production, as it was stated by the student of Chomsky, Slobin, see Lengyel (1981, 324). Consequently, every child in any kindergarten group needs personal approach and individually tailored L2 teaching methods.

In case of older children, the L2 teacher has to sort out what has been acquired by them, what experiences they got about the language and culture and it is important to find out their preferences concerning L2 activities and learning. It is advisable in this case to highlight those elements that have been successful while learning the language, and to base further teaching on them, while playing down the unsuccessful experiences and elements of learning. On the other hand, there is another task, what the L2 teacher has to solve in a proper way: how to integrate into the activities of those children who have different L2 learning background, and those who have just been introduced the target language elements. These children's expectations towards L2 activities are basically different. However, there are some general expectations that are common in L2 learners of very young age. A description of these expectations is given below.

First, children in any kindergarten (in our case in the L2 one), regardless of their age group, expect to be involved in playful activities, where teaching is not the main constituent of their behavior. It is for the first time in their life that they take part in organized group activities, the aim of which is to learn something, the name of which is English language. They perceive the language differently than adults. For them, L2 is not a means of getting a higher social and/or economic status, or getting new friends, information, etc. Children conceive L2 as part of their joyful activities, which is a need for them to be able to navigate in the artificial and magic world which has been created partly by their L2 teacher and partly by themselves. Because these children decide to participate in this magic and imagined world where L2 elements play a significant role, they expect that their teacher teaches them these elements. Of course, this does not mean that the teacher has to teach them in the traditional understanding of the term. On the contrary, he/she has to provide that natural L2 interaction sphere, where children may learn these L2 elements in a natural way, just like they did, not long ago, with their mother tongue. Of course, in order to be able to achieve this goal, a variety of instructional techniques should be employed, as stated by Kolb (1984).

Second, they expect to participate in different activities, and they are prepared to do this wholeheartedly if they are chosen and organized according to their needs and desires. They are full of expectations, and if the classroom 'reality' meets their desires, they will be acting as planned by the EFL teacher. The teacher's task is to make sure that every segment of the learning process provides children the emotional, cognitive and mental challenges they need intrinsically.

Third, children expect to be engaged in activities, which comply their imagined world, where toy bears, cars, puppets and pictures, depicting different animals are part of the 'game' they are willing to play as the activities are challenging their skills, attention, competitiveness, collaboration skills, etc.

All these mean, that the EFL teacher must organize activities according to the above factors, and also must ensure, that these activities will last as long, as they are really enjoyable and challenging to all of the children. In this way they have to be adapted to the individual requirements of the participating children. From the linguistic point of view, L2 teachers have to bear in mind that children of this age like creating new words that are not used by anybody and have their particular meaning, which can be decoded only by the child who has created them. However, these utterances, or to put it another way, playing with language, creates a kind of “bilingualism” (Büki, Egyed & Pléh 1984, 24-25), and on the base of this creativity, the L2 teacher can build the acquisition of the target language as well.

The fourth and final, children’s expectation is that they are treated similarly to the way they would be treated in their family circle, i.e., the elder mates should help the younger ones if needed, and the EFL teacher should act similarly to their mother and/or grandmother, or caretaker. A strict school like teacher’s behavior destroys children’s expectation towards the magic world, in which they are eager to encounter with the fairy phenomena, the name of which is English language. Shortly, EFL teachers must treat children in the L2 kindergarten classes as members of a bigger ‘family’, the name of which is the kindergarten group.

Each of these four expectations of the children has to be understood by the EFL teachers as an individual need. The children may vary in age from 3;0 to 6;0, they are of different sexes, have different family background, different requirements, attitudes and aptitudes, and have been through not too long, but different experiences concerning the world and people around them.

The management of the children’s group/s

Preparation is a crucial element of managing any group of learners, and it has its own importance when speaking about managing children of very young age, who have not been accustomed to almost any kind of classroom management yet. The first task of any L2 teacher is to group children appropriately. Moon (2004, 130) lists the following criteria of grouping children:

- friendship
- ability
- mixed ability
- shared interest

In our case, while speaking about L2 acquisition by children aged 3;0 -6;0 it is also important to take into consideration the age factor, while grouping children, i.e. a three-year old child may find common interests with peers of his/her age easier than with elder ones. Of course it does not mean that in their group older, e.g. six-year-old children should not be involved. On the contrary,

their presence can be challenging and at the same time very facilitating while learning e.g. the rules of a new game or activity, etc., which can provide plenty of unexpected things. They can also contribute quite a lot to the younger children's negotiation of meaning. As Pinter (2006, p. 59) states "younger children...cannot reliably take responsibility for clarifying things in conversation". Her finding is backed up by other researchers as well (Ellis & Heimback 1997).

2.4 Communication

As Curtain (2004, 24) states "there is a compelling thrust in language teaching toward a new organizing principle for language instruction: meaningful communication in the context of a holistic approach to learning". I agree with Curtain (25), who states that while teaching L2 to YLs, concentrating on meaning is more important than on form because children's brain and attention is searching for meaning the extent of which is in close connection with children's general intellectual abilities as we can see in the works of some researchers (Sprenger 1999; Caine & Caine 1997; Sylwester 1995; Wolfe 2001; Báthory 1997; Clements 2001; Feiler, Gary 1999; Watson 1996). In this meaningful context, while communicating L2 elements to children, it is important to make balance between using L1 and L2 elements. There are situations when a mixture of the two language elements is inevitable to provide that perception, about which Piaget (1977) stated that it is the dominant element of children's thinking. However, while being engaged with chants, rhymes, listening to and singing songs, etc., L2 elements should be predominant ones, creating that kind of L2 language environment to children which can further facilitate their motivation, attitude and aptitude towards language and culture, and their L2 development as well. In this way children have enough opportunity to "absorb the language before they have to say anything" (Pinter, 2006, p. 50). Total Physical Response (TPR), worked out in America in the 1960s goes hand in hand with such listening activity which contains appropriate, easily memorable language elements. Büki, Egyed and Pléh (1984, 98) state that the child wants to find and memorize those elements of the language which are longer than words, in an unconscious way.

3. Teaching English from the children's point of view

3.1. How do young children learn?

First of all, it is facilitating to have an overview about learning in general, and learning first, and second languages (L2s) by young learners (YLs) in particular. An overview of the literature written on this issue can also be of interest for those who intend to teach any second language in kindergartens. The so called age factor, the Critical Period Hypothesis is also of interest in our case, when speaking about kindergarten L2 acquisition.

Speaking about learning in general, it is important to notice that it is mainly about change, which contributes to the development of new skills, and in our case, speaking about children of very young age in particular, formation of their attitudes towards the world, the new (kindergarten) sphere around them. Of course this formation is not an incidental one for them, and not natural as it happens e.g. with our appearance when we get older. Here a purposefully organized physical surrounding (the kindergarten class with all of its equipment) is involved and one or sometimes even two or three kindergarten L2 teachers, whose main aim is to introduce them into a new world, the parameters of which are rotated around a phenomenon, the name of which is English language. These children are involved to learn merely in a playful and 'magic' way, according to their expectations, attitudes and aptitudes, and cognitive development. Learning L2 in their case, just like acquiring their mother tongue not long ago, is going on in an unconscious way, while experiencing the elements of the target language, both while listening to them and interacting, using (at least partly) them in a well-organized surrounding and cosy, child-friendly atmosphere.

They might discover that some elements of L2 are exciting for them, some of them represent challenging features, and others trigger their curiosity towards the language, being acquired, and the people, who speak it as their mother tongue. When they reach the stage when they are eager to remember and understand, and recall L2 elements, we can speak about really effective motivation, and successful L2 learning. In the next part of this paper we will underpin an overview of the literature on the theoretical aspects provided for us by educational psychology dealing with children, learning second languages in kindergartens. For L2 kindergarten teachers it is very important to relate what they are doing in an L2 kindergarten classroom to some educational theory in connection with second language acquisition.

A sound knowledge of children's psychology and their behavior can guarantee that in the kindergarten classroom both the L2 teacher and children feel a constructive atmosphere, where L2 learning can take place in an enjoyable and stress-free way. The L2 teachers (knowing exactly, what processes are going on in the minds of their pupils, what concerns, expectations, desires, etc. they have) are able to "optimize their learning through the provision of conditions that make it as easy a process as possible" (Reece & Walker 2000, 69). In the following part of this paper we can see what the literature says about factors determining children's learning in general, and L2 acquisition in particular.

First of all, we have to speak about the three domains (*psychomotor, cognitive, and affective*), which are to be considered while speaking about children's learning. The skills which are concerned with physical dexterity (*psychomotor ones*) are of primary importance in the case of children of very young age, because their development goes in parallel with the one of their cognitive skills.

Consequently, while teaching them in our case English, or any other foreign language, it is very important to bear in mind, that involving them into any activities, L2 teachers should be aware of the development stage of their psychomotor skills.

In case of some children the extent and difficulty level of a certain activity, involving physical reactions from the children, can be challenging and extremely facilitating, while in case of others, they can be boring and dull, but in case of some others, they can cause anxiety, simply because their psychomotor skills are not developed enough, do not match the difficulty level of the assigned task. In order to be able to use this skill, children need to use their knowledge as well; emphasis in this case is not merely on cognition. As they are physical skills, the development of them needs as much practice as possible. All these mean that in most of the cases there are children in kindergarten groups who face the difficulties not only in connection with the acquisition of certain L2 elements, but the ones which are in connection with their psychomotor skill development. Peer assistance or L2 teacher help can ease their concerns and/or anxiety, and create that cosy atmosphere, which is of crucial importance in the case of very young L2 learners.

In these circumstances their *cognitive* (thinking) *skills* can also develop, which are in close connection of knowing 'how' and 'why', while taking active part in the activities mainly going on in the middle of the kindergarten classroom on the big carpet. The development of their thought processes can go hand in hand with the development of their knowledge about and of the second language to be acquired in the kindergarten.

The third, the *affective skill*, which is often neglected in general in the process of children's learning, should be paid special attention in the case of children aged 3;0 – 6;0 because they deal with feelings and emotions and are totally different from the above mentioned two domains.

Teachers in general tend to teach their subjects by using the most logical order concerning each topic. However, it has to be mentioned that in kindergartens, L2 teachers teach a variety of topics at different levels, depending on the topic itself and the subjects to be taught. According to educational literature, each issue must be taught in the most appropriate way. Henceforth, it is important for L2 kindergarten teachers to take into consideration all domains, and the level of difficulties within these domains. In our case the affective domain has its own particular importance and the classification of levels within this domain, which is called 'taxonomy'. The levels within the affective domain were identified by Krathwohl et al. (1964) and a simplified version of it will be shown below:

Characterisation Overall behavior in connection with internalized values
Organization The setting of values according to behavior
Valuating In connection with behavior depending on belief or attitude in situations where obedience is not required
Respond According to actual expectations by appropriately reacting to circumstances
Receiving Being aware of and attending certain stimuli in a passive way, e.g. listening

The difficulty level is increasing, and it reaches the highest level at the top. Here goes the process of more and more internalization of feelings and attitudes. When actualizing this chart to the acquisition of L2 by YLs, we can state, that at the end of this process, the children's behavior in the kindergarten classroom becomes a part of their total way of responding to stimuli provided by the activities going on in the circle, where all (or most) children are active participants. As we can see, at the beginning children are expected to participate only passively and be aware of the instructions the L2 teacher gives them. Their L2 listening skills can be developed in this way, while getting more and more acquainted with L2 elements, the rhythm and phonetic characteristic features of it. This can be called a 'tuning in' preparatory period, which is inevitable for achieving the highest level, when children are able to internalize the received L2 information. At this level children's feelings and attitudes will be an inevitable part of their behavior in the activities taking place on the big carpet in the middle of the kindergarten L2 classroom. Thus, speaking about, let us say, a team game, where several rules are to be internalized, at lower levels, children are told how to play the game/s, and in order to be really able to play them, they are supposed to listen to these rules actively. Of course, repetition of the instruction by the L2 teacher is needed here as many times as it is possible so that they could be comprehended by every single child in the group. In some cases a switch to L1 can be imagined at the beginning to make it easier to understand what is required for completing the activity, i.e. playing the game with full swing and enjoyment. At the highest level the rules being heard and overheard several times will be applied automatically as the requirements of the game to be played and appropriately in that part of the game where they are to be applied, without thinking about them as separate domains. In this way these regulations or rules become a part of children's way of life lived in the frames of the kindergarten class.

These taxonomies are useful to be considered by L2 kindergarten teachers because knowing their operation in the kindergarten classrooms, teachers can understand how they relate to L2 learning. Of course the children's entry behavior, the level of objectives, which are in close connection with these taxonomies, and the extent of assessing children's achievements and participation in games depends a good deal on the certain age group the children belong to. Consequently, it is facilitating to have a closer look at the age factor, namely what characteristic features have the children aged 3;0 to 6;0. We will talk about it later. Now let us see what the literature says about learning languages at this very young age, and what different language learning philosophies exist.

Children aged 3;0 have already internalized their L1 and have a substantial vocabulary to express themselves, communicate their needs, desires, and even concerns. However, in order to be able to really profoundly understand what exactly is going on in their minds while acquiring any L2 it is inevitable to have a closer look at some factors which can determine the whole process of L2 acquisition. Chomsky (1968, 1969), is in the position that there is an innate language capacity in humans, which determines the whole language acquisition. On the other hand, Lenneberg (1964, 1967), while speaking about innate language capacities and investigating biological aspects of speech, argues that human speech is species specific. Scovel (1998, 17-18) also shares Lenneberg's opinion concerning innateness, saying that most of the "psycholinguists now hold that the acquisition of human language is not based solely on the external influence of a child's environment." Ellis (2000), speaking about second language acquisition compares behaviourist (the dominant psychological learning theory of the 1950s and 1960s) and mentalist learning theories (in the 1960s and 1970s), underlying, that according to the behaviorists, second language leaning takes place as a result of habit formation where repetition is a main element of learning.

Speaking about behaviorist approach Ellis (2000, 32) states that "behaviorist accounts of L2 acquisition emphasize only what can be directly observed (i.e. the 'input' to the learner and the learner's own 'output') and ignore what goes on in the 'black box' of the learner's mind. From our point of view this theory can be of interest while speaking about L2 acquisition by children of very young age, knowing that repetition of unanalyzed chunks of the language plays a significant role of L2 acquisition. Speaking about mentalist theory of language learning Ellis states that according to this theory the most important factor is how human mind's innate properties interact while language learning takes place. According to this theory the Language Acquisition Device (or to put it in a more linguistically accurate way, the 'Universal Grammar' as Chomsky stated and defended by Pinker, 1994) in the human mind plays a significant role in language learning. We cannot say that this hidden Device has no importance in the process of acquiring languages by children aged 3;0 to 6;0. However, taking into consideration that teachers of L2s in kindergartens are very practice oriented,

whose main attention is concentrated on the process of acquisition and creating necessary meaningful context for L2 learning, it seems to us acceptable to pay more attention to the theory which emphasizes practice-based language acquisition. We can say it on the base of observing and self-observing day-to-day behavior and activities of the children in the L2 kindergarten classes. It does not mean however, that L2 kindergarten teachers should not be aware of the mental processes going on in their pupils' minds while learning the language.

All these findings are rotating around the innateness and some behavioral domains of humans' language producing capacity. While agreeing with these scientific facts and taking for granted that there is an innateness concerning speech production, it is important to speak about differences, which children of very young age have, concerning their mental, physical, cognitive and emotional characteristic features, which can influence speech production.

4. The study

Time: 15.31

The kindergarten observation took place 25/09/2008 in Pécs. I had an access to the Portfolio, which contained:

I. List of names

II. Diary about outage and entrance year 2008/2009 II. senior group

Children's data, Parents' day telephone numbers

III. Kindergarten registration document:

- Parents' occupation: vet, acrobat, animal caretaker, firefighter, nurse, architect, shopkeeper, hairdresser, era, nose and throat specialist, policeman, GP, dog-hairdresser, masseur, kindergarten helper, kindergarten teacher

IV. Data sheet for pedagogic advice service

V. Teaching timeframe

The observation began right after finishing activities with the previous group in an adjacent room and lasted for 30 minutes (as long as the activities lasted). I used digital voice recording, note taking and video recording for data collection.

Venue: the next room in the same building. The arrangement of the room is almost the same as of the 1st one.

Participants: 10 children (4 boys, 6 girls, aged 3;0 to 6;0). Generally, there are 16 children in the group but today some are missing.

4.1. Activities

Children are sitting on a big carpet placed in the middle of the classroom. Its color is orange with patterns. Children are listening to a toy, which is being held by one of the girls, and is singing in English. T.: repeats the simple words of the toy, like "I'm here, I'm big, I can dance and I can jump, etc., and children repeat the words, singing together. T.: sings the song alone, some children join in singing, not too confident at the beginning. They use body language while singing.]

T. holds a book in her hands. The book: "Dear Zoo" (Rod Campbell, 1982) is of A5 size. Inside there are photos of animals which can be covered with a card installed under the photo. If the animal is dangerous, it is written on the card: danger. In the book there are animals, like elephant, etc. (There is another book used: "I'm Hungry!", Rod Campbell. 2003.)

T.: Can we keep an elephant at home? Seeing, that not all of the children understand her, repeats in Hungarian: lehet elefántot otthon tartani? T.: goes on in similar way, asking: can we keep a giraffe at home? (And so on). At the end T. says: bye, bye. Children are repeating her words.

Child: puputeve! T.: how is it in English? – Camel.

T. sits on a small chair at the edge of the carpet. Some of the children are taking their small chairs and sitting on them while the others are sitting on the carpet.

T.: holds the picture of an animal in her hands and asking: what is it? Children altogether with big enthusiasm: it's a monkey. The activity is going on: T. is asking the name of another animal and the children are answering together in English.

T.: Let's play a little bit, stand up! Children are standing up, ready to play. There is a game of 'catch the other'. At first T. shows how to play the game, after children are participating actively in it. The rule of the game: a child goes round and says while putting his/her hand on the head of one mate: "duck". Nothing happens, as the word 'duck' is what they expected. But if the child says: "goose", the mate whose head is touched, is supposed to run round the carpet. Children are participating in this game, taking turns.

There is music going on from the tape recorder. Children dance (some of them in pairs, the others together). One child goes to the T. asking permission to go out. T.: go out.

T.: Marci, you did not listen! Let's try it again without the tape recorder. T. sings the song earlier heard from the tape. Children slowly join her singing, clapping their hands and moving around. Children are continuously reacting to T's interaction.

T. is sitting on the carpet. Children are doing the same.

T. introduces some animals from her folder, using flip charts worked out by Nikolov Marianne. T.: is showing a picture saying: it's a bird, children are repeating after T. Children are participating actively in the activity. One boy is sitting a little further from the T. T.: Robi, come here. The boy is going closer to the T.

T. is showing a picture saying: it is an ice cream. Do you like ice cream Kata? The girl answers: yes, I like ice cream.

T.: This is a horse. Children repeat in English.

T.: What is this? Somebody says: Tiger! Tiger!

T.: No, it's a lion. Children: Lion, lion.

T.: Yes, it's a lion. Well done! Well done!

The activity is going on involving the names of other animals, and fruits like: rabbit, crocodile, frog, banana etc.

T.: Close your eyes! Folds some pictures so that they cannot be seen, and after some minutes shows it to the children asking: What is this? Children are answering together: a rabbit, a banana, etc.

At the end, an evaluation process follows, when the L2 teacher gives short responses concerning children's participation.

End of activities: 16.01

4.2. Analyses

As we can see this spontaneous event, (i.e. using a toy, being brought accidentally to the classroom by a girl,) can serve as prompting children's imagination while singing together with an object: the girl's toy. The fact itself that the toy belongs to one of their mates (the girl from their group) brings a feeling of novelty into their engagement with learning new English words. While all of their attention is concentrated on the toy, their teacher interferes into the 'game' by singing together with the toy and acting out what is being sung. Meanwhile, children, being accustomed to the routine, according to which they act out language elements together with their teacher, conclude, that their teacher also wants to take part in their 'game' the initiative of which has been the girl's toy. This spontaneous initiating of the 'game' has its own importance, because all of the following activities, i.e., singing the song of the toy and repeating the words, and phrases, like *I'm, here, I'm big, I can dance and I can jump* are considered by children as something natural, what was not imposed on them artificially, but came as the desire of the little girl to show what she had been given by her parents. It has to be mentioned that children like to be the initiators of their activities all the time, when negotiating of meaning is important for them. In this case, this negotiation of the activity came automatically, because the teacher recognized the motivational potential hidden in the singing toy. By singing together with the teacher and the toy, children's L2 acquisition is facilitated a good deal, because, as it was stated by Phillips (2003. p.29) "songs and

rhymes provide a rich source of texts for acting out. They are especially useful in classes of younger children who may not be able to produce much of their own language." In our case, in parallel with developing children's vocabulary and interaction skills, the activity serves as a good 'tuning in device', which can determine the whole following part of the classroom activities.

Children can scaffold by listening at least three sources of utterances: the toy, their teacher, and their mates around them as they utter the words of the song by singing. In this way the simple song of the toy can trigger all the mental and physical capacity of children, and facilitate L2 learning, as "rhythm and melody make language easier to learn and remember, and movement and gesture help illustrate meaning. Songs appeal to the whole child through visual, aural and kinaesthetic (physical) channels. Songs can be used as the first step to a more independent kind of acting" (Phillips, 2003. p.29). Songs are also a useful element concerning the L2 development of those children who are shy and are not willing to utter L2 elements on their own. Uttering the words of the song together with their mates provides the opportunity for them to say the words together with them, at the beginning at a very low voice, just like testing themselves, how their vocal system is tuned to the new language elements, while doing a lot of movement, i.e. dancing together with the mates and the teacher, and acting out what is being sung. There is an interaction of physical and mental activities while singing and acting out in a group, and it can be observed, that as their physical "production" becomes more and more elaborated, parallel with their mental "production", i.e. their capacity of uttering the words heard in the song is also automatically developing.

All these result at the end in the capacity to utter the words and phrases, being rehearsed (in our case *I'm here, I'm big, I can dance and I can jump, etc.*), in authentic interaction situation, independently from the situation described above. In this introduction part, children could get acquainted with words describing their appearance, which is in accordance with their mental development, i.e. they like speaking about themselves, because of their self-orientation. However, they also like speaking about and dealing with animals as well, and consequently, while feeling that an activity is becoming over-repeated, or to put it another way, when it is beginning to lose its novelty, it is always facilitating to switch on to another type of activity, just like it was done by the observed L2 kindergarten teacher. She based the next part of the classroom activities on two books. In one of them there were pictures of animals, while in the other, different items of food. In this way she introduced children cross curricular material, i.e. ideas from geography and biology or catering industry. We can witness code switching in the initiating stage of the activity, when L2 teacher noticed that not all children are able to understand the question "*Can we keep an elephant at home?*", repeating the same question in Hungarian: "*lehet elefántot otthon tartani?*" Thanks to this intentional code switching, children feel

confidence and are able to participate in the activity, which serves as a motivational “device” and as a result, children are repeating the names of the animals seen in the picture book almost endlessly, and a chance of acquiring them is quite big. The motivational factor is higher in this case than in another situation when e.g. domestic animals are seen and “discussed”, because these animals represent an exotic world for them, and in this way the pictures contain that “magic” without which children’s world is not complete. They like to feel this enchanted aspect all the time, even if dealing with the so called L2 acquisition.

Children get great pleasure and are highly motivated when seeing the animals described above. As it can be seen in our observation, even after the L2 teacher had finished the activity saying “bye,bye”, one of the boys pointed at a picture in the book, and uttered: “*puputeve!*” The teacher immediately reacted to the utterance, saying: “How is it in English?” and seeing that the boy is not able to answer the question, she gave the English equivalent of the name of the animal, saying: “*camel!*” While interacting with the boy she noticed, that the others are also interested in getting to know more about the animals, and she went on with asking the names of other animals, and the answers were given by all the children, who were saying the names of the animals together, enjoying the common activity. Basically the “*what*”, “*how*” and “*can*” language elements were being practiced in this way in parallel with the mentioned cross curricular segments, creating a really useful L2 environment to children. As we can see children enjoy the activity very much, what is expressed by their willingness to communicate with the teacher, e.g. when teacher asks “what is it?” some boys react by repeating the answer: “*tiger, tiger!*” This repetition of the lexeme shows on the one hand their enjoyment and on the other hand their natural need for repeating (almost endlessly) the new L2 elements in order to be able to remember them later. However, as we could see, to be sensitive towards children’s individual differences and specific language related needs is a prerequisite of really successful activities. According to Magocsa (2009. p. 69), “If the teacher finds the appropriate individual approach and uses individually tailored methods, we can say that the activities are really meaningful and really facilitate every single child’s development, and partly his/her L2 development.” From this individual approach and personally tailored teaching methods follows that after a certain time all the children feel that the activities are organized for them as individual participants in the activities.

5. Conclusion

As we can see, there are findings which are to be considered by L2 teachers of very young learners, and there are of course a lot more of them, which can replace others, if the teachers follow research continuously, about which Bates (1967), quoted by Green (1989), declared that ‘Research is the process of going

alleys to see if they are blind'. It is very important for every L2 teacher to be familiar with the research of their field, i.e. L2 teaching to children of very young age, because in this way, by following the newer and newer findings they can carry out their L2 teaching work in an effective way, and feel the 'pulse' of modern scientific life, which has been trying to find newer and newer answers to questions produced by contemporary life and teaching situations.

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