**Teaching children to read English**

Whenever we teach young learners at school, whatever the subject, we need to start with their world and what they know from home. Take reading, for example – what kinds of reading are children familiar with at home? Some parents read to their children and others don’t. Some children see their parents reading and writing and some don’t. Some children will receive direct instructions from their parents while some will get much more informal help. There’s a huge range of experience. All this means that one specific teaching method will not be successful with all children. A range of teaching strategies that match the needs of all the different kinds of children should be used.

One of the important aspects that teachers must realize when teaching English to children, aged 5 to 7 years, is the characteristics of children. Learning English for children is not an ordinary thing. The teacher has to know the characteristics of children well so that they can teach English properly.

Children can say what they have heard; children can use a wide range of intonation patterns into their mother tongue; children can understand direct human interaction; children know that rules must be obeyed; children use language skills long before they know it; children perceive things around them through hand movements, sight and hearing; children are eager to learn; children think seriously and more logically, they are able to solve problems that are more complex; children don't always ask; children have short attention span and concentration; children do not always understand what the teacher is pointing at; children do not always admit that they do not understand what the teacher has explained;; children love to play and learn to the fullest when they enjoy it; children dislike criticism; children have high enthusiasm and positive attitude towards learning so teachers must believe in them that they will be successful in their learning.

The reader must be able to interpret the written words. Children as language learners have a great opportunity to be able to read in English as early as possible. Reading skills will be mastered by children when they first have decoding skills.

Children can decode words when they know that words are composed of letters so it becomes very important for the teacher to teach all the letters; children can decode words when they know that they are made up of letters that make sounds when spoken so it is important for teachers to teach children to be able to map the letters into their sounds.

There are two approaches to teaching reading in English that are effective: the phonics method and the whole-word recognition approach which include the achievement of decoding skills.

* **Phonics**

The phonics method generally allows a pupil to establish a strong correlation between a sound and a grapheme, that is, the visual representation of a sound.

One of the things children do when they read in their mother tongue is try to sound out words letter by letter and then put them together. This is what phonics means – teaching children how written letters correspond to sounds. The best place to begin phonics teaching is with the sounds of the first letters of words children already know. For example, *a is for apple*. Children listen to the letter name and sound, and point to a picture of an apple. Then they listen and chant. Chanting is a way to help children remember letter sounds. There are pictures and flashcards to help children associate the letter with the word and its meaning. Then there are reading and circling activities in which children circle the letters at the beginning of words. The first sound of a word is easy to hear so children can build an association between the letter and its sound. Further on, letter combinations such as *sh* and *ch* which in English have one sound only– digraphs – are very common in English so it makes sense to teach these to children early on.

When children know the sounds of the letters they can sound out words phonically. To read the word *cat* using phonics, the child sounds out each letter of the word, saying the sound for *c* (like *k* in *king*), the sound for *a* (like *a* in *apple*), and the sound for *t* (like *t* in *tiger*). The child may say the sounds haltingly at first, with a break between each, but then he or she can blend the sounds together to create the word seamlessly.

Starting with short and simple words which follow a CVC (consonant – vowel - consonant) pattern keeps this process easier. Some of the first words taught this way are with the same middle vowel sound (*cat, man, fan).* Many beginner readers for young learners rely on the phonics method and offer a rich variety of titles where stories are grouped according to the sound pattern in words. In this way, phonics provides a sound basis for teaching reading.

* **The Whole-word recognition**

With the introduction of more complex words, the Whole Word method can come in handy. Many children learn to recognize the whole shape of word, for example instead of spelling out the word *tiger* children might recognize it as a whole. Moreover, in English there are lots of words that you cannot spell out letter by letter and children need to learn to recognize them (for example, *blue, two, through*). This is also known as *sight vocabulary*. Whole-word recognition can be taught in lots of different ways for example there are many different memory games. Word displays are one more way to support this. New or longer and complex words can be written down on a thick card, possibly color-coded according to topic, and placed on the wall of your class where learners can easily see them.

Teachers should be careful about asking young learners to read longer texts. Teachers can get their children to read short texts or dialogues which have been practiced orally many times before by letting them follow texts, songs and chants in the book while listening to them on the CD.

Young learners are motivated if they succeed and they succeed if they are motivated. To support that learning start with phonics and develop whole-word and longer texts skills but at the same time offer a range of varied, fun activities.