

MAPLE BEAR PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Acquiring a Second Language

1. How to learn a second language a child passes through the following stages

1. Listening
2. Comprehension or understanding
3. Speaking
4. Reading
5. Writing

These stages are followed, in that order, no matter at what age the second language is presented. As a child enters a second stage the preceding stage is not ended. One stage builds on the preceding stage.

Listening

Listening and comprehension
Listening, comprehension and speaking
Listening, comprehension, speaking, and reading
Listening, comprehension, speaking, reading and writing

All children speak at least one language when they arrive at school. Consider how they learn their first language.

Babies

- hear voices and sounds from before birth.
- hear a lot of sounds.
- respond to the voices of their mother, father or other people caring for them.
- play with sound, experiment and practice making sounds.
- begin to associate sounds with what they see and understand.
- begin to use their sounds and beginning language to interact with their caregivers to get what they want or need.

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Young children:

- repeat what they hear others saying.
- pick up the accent of those around them.

2. Characteristics

As a young learner the child is:

- developing quickly as an individual.
- learning in a variety of ways: by watching, listening, imitating, and doing things.
- not able to understand the rules of grammar about a language.
- trying to make sense of situations by reading non-verbal clues.
- using their mother tongue to talk about what they understand and do.
- imitating the sounds that are heard and mimicking the ways adults speak.
- naturally curious.
- learning through play and using his/her imagination.
- comfortable with routines and enjoys repetition.
- in need of a lot of variety because of a short attention span.

As a teacher you can help by:

- making learning English enjoyable and fun.
- not worrying about mistakes.
- being encouraging. The child needs to feel comfortable to participate.
- using a lot pictures, gestures, actions, and sketches to demonstrate what you mean.
- talking a lot to the children in English especially about things they can see in their environment.
- playing games, saying rhymes, singing, and doing finger plays together.
- telling simple stories in English using pictures and acting with different voices.
- not worrying when the children use their mother tongue. You can sometimes recast a mother- tongue question in English and answer in English. Example: The child requests a drink of water in his first language. You would say, in English, “You want a drink of water? Yes, you can have a drink of water.”
- constantly recycling new language. Don’t be afraid to add new things or words they don’t know.

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Example:

Teacher says, “Good morning...”

- Children
- Everybody
- Boys and girls
- Girls and boys
- Friends

Substitute: “Good afternoon...” or “Hello...”

Children reply, “Good morning, Mr., Mrs, Ms, Miss...”

- Surname
- First name
- Both names

Substitute: “Good afternoon...” or “Hello...”

Varying your activities – some quiet, some noisy, some sitting, some standing, some moving.

Very young learners (under 7 years of age) acquire a new language...

- through hearing and experiencing lots of English in much the same way they acquire their first language.
- learn through doing things and playing. They are not consciously trying to learn new words or phrases. The second language is learned incidentally.
- love playing with language sounds, imitating and making funny noises. The sounds of a different language are strange and funny. Children and teacher should have fun playing with words and phrases. Example – Sing the sounds or exaggerate your expression of these sounds. Using the word BIG - Stand on a chair, stretch out your arms, puff out your cheeks and use a low, big voice and say BIG. Get the children to stand and stretch out their arms and legs and use booming voices to repeat BIG.
- are unable to organize their learning and are frequently unaware that they are learning a second language.
- are unable to read or write in their mother tongue so it is important to recycle new words through talk and play.
- grammar will develop gradually on its own provided the children hear a lot of English and learn to understand a lot of words and phrases.

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- children will eventually respond correctly to words and phrases and you will know they understand.

*Hearing two or more languages in childhood is not a cause of a language disorder or delay. There is no scientific evidence to prove this.

**Children will use two languages within one sentence. This is not a sign of confusion. They are still producing more sentences using their first language. Children will do this when they have acquired a limited amount of new vocabulary. They will use their new vocabulary in the right places.

***They will use more than one language in a sentence when speaking to people they know have an understanding of both languages and that these people will not be upset by this. It depends on the social context. As they become more fluent they will be able to talk to their classmates in their new language and to their grandparents in their first language.

3. Techniques That Help

- Use body language and expression to help the children 'read' what you are saying or doing.
- Use items in the class as visual clues to get your message across. Example- With blocks you can show colour, size, number, sequence and patterns, and shapes. With a few balls you can do all of the above and demonstrate speed by rolling the balls on a flat floor or an inclined plane.
- Begin a collection of pictures from magazines, posters, discarded books and ads so that you can use them to get your message across. File them according to action words (verbs), foods, feelings, transportation, etc, etc.
- Have a chart paper, black or white board in your teaching area, so that you can quickly sketch a picture of what you are saying to the children.
- Try not to translate the English word(s) into the child's first language. As a teacher we feel a need to get information into the children as quickly as possible. Translation does this very quickly and requires no effort on the child's part. Translation also encourages lazy thinking, inattentiveness and inactive learning skills. The children will simply wait for you to translate.

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Constantly talk your way through every thing you do:

Example: to explain shape activity with paper, felt pens, scissor and glue. Hold up the circle traced on a paper and say, "This is a circle." Go around the circle shape with your finger and repeat, "This is a circle." Hold up the scissor and say, "This is a scissor." Put the scissor down and pick it up again while saying, "I (point to self) take the scissor (scoop up the scissor) and I (point to self) cut out the circle (cut out the circle)." Show the cut out circle and say, "This is a circle." Hold up the glue and say, "This is the glue. "I take the glue and put the glue on the circle." Do so. Then say, "I put the circle on the sheet of paper." You do so. Show a felt pen and say, "This is a felt pen (or marker). I take the felt pen and I write my name of the paper." You do so and say, "I write my name Mrs...." Point to name and then to self and repeat, "This is my name."

The children have been exposed to body language, verbal cues, and visual cues. You have not had to use their first language. They understand and can complete the activity. They were active listeners because they had to observe your every move and also listen attentively as you showed them what to do while using the English 'labels.'

- You will feel very alone at first, because the children will infrequently interact with you. Persist with English only and all the visuals you can use and soon you will have the children responding with a look, a smile, or a word.
- Learners go through a 'silent period' in which they develop comprehension skills in the new language and use their first language to express their ideas and feelings.
- The 3 year-old child may not be understanding all the words being used by their family and other adults in their 1st language. This might be developmental and will resolve itself with time. If you think it is from lack of stimulation at home, contact the 1st language teacher.

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- It may happen that the child's 2nd language vocabulary becomes greater than the 1st language vocabulary. Contact the 1st language teacher, who should be coordinating her program to yours. Example – Children should know their colours and be able to count to 10 or 20 or 30 in both languages.
- You will know children have an understanding when you are working with them at a table and you tell John to go get a scissor and he does.
- I would use the child's first language to console someone who is hurt or sick. That child needs to be reassured that you are contacting the parents and all will be well soon. It is important for the child (and parents) to feel the school is a safe and caring place.