

On functional-kinaesthetic evolution for 4th graders

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Bartek has just finished the third grade and is now on a short holiday abroad. He'd like to buy a roll and a bottle of orange juice, but doesn't quite know how to ask for it. He's growing up, but he doesn't really need to talk about rocket science or philosophy. What he needs is two or three language structures and some vocabulary that will help him buy food.

10th July, 2012

Kuba finished the third grade over a month ago and is now on holiday at the seaside. He's building sand castles and even though he has seen them before, it was nothing compared to the sensation of moulding the wet sand with his hands. He's growing up, but playing with the sand and other kids is still so much fun.

28th August, 2012

Bartek and Kuba are talking about the new school year, which begins next week. They're moving from grade three to grade four and they know life is about to change. However, looking at each other, they realize that they haven't changed that much – there are some holiday scratches and bruises, there's some suntan, but they're really almost the same as they were two months ago. They're growing up, but it seems to be a rather slow process...

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We are the lucky fathers of the two fantastic ten-year-old creatures introduced above. They will soon begin their upper-primary education, and luckily, they seem to care less about it than we do. As language teachers, we might be scared of the expectations set ahead of us by the ministry, the school and the parents. However, the fears we face are minor compared to what the kids will be going through – they will be facing a transition from having one teacher to having one for every subject, and even their form mistress will no longer spend as much time with them as their early education teacher did. They will be taught separate subjects, and will also take breaks after 45 minutes, not when they feel tired. To top it all, there will be tests and quizzes, and growing demands to get good grades.

To all those of us who feel apprehensive about the future of our present third-graders, there's hope. We'd like to kinaesthetic an approach that we call 'functional sensory evolution', which will hopefully put many teachers' minds at ease and help to make the transition to the fourth grade smoother.

From function to communication

When you think about why you express ideas in any language, it is seldom the case that you say something because you've just learnt that nice little structure. Few Polish parents (if any) teach their kids that when they're thirsty, they need to use the verb „chcieć” in the third person singular, followed by the first person singular object pronoun, followed by the reflexive pronoun „się”, with the infinitive of „pić” to top it all. What normally happens instead is that a thirsty child will just yell „Chce mi się pić!” and the whole wide world around gets the message. It seems that before we say something, we must feel a need which we then express in words. In case of ten-year-olds, they hardly ever feel the need to talk about Aristotle or nuclear reactions, but they might be interested in how to buy a bottle of Coke or how to order a meal in a restaurant when they go abroad. In our opinion, language functions should be given priority over language structures, which is in perfect keeping with Nowa Podstawa Programowa. The document states that at the end of upper primary education an average student uses a very basic set of language resources which help them to express their ideas on a set of specified subjects, such as home, school life or sports, and other typical teenage contexts. Furthermore, according to NPP, a student is able to react verbally in simple situations, such as talking about likes and dislikes or asking for information.

When we think about the contents of the first three units of an English coursebook book for ten-year-olds, we are no longer likely to find 'forms of be', 'Saxon Genitive' or 'have got'. Instead, the contents will probably look like this:

UNIT	GRAMMAR
Unit 1 Page 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present Simple with <i>be - I, you</i> (affirmative and negative sentences, questions and short answers) Questions - <i>What, How</i>
Unit 2 Page 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present Simple with <i>be - he, she, it</i> (affirmative and negative sentences, questions and short answers) Questions - <i>What, How, Who</i> Articles - <i>a / an</i> (1)
Unit 3 Page 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possessive <i>'s</i> Questions - <i>Whose</i> Possessive adjectives - <i>my, your, its</i> Possessive adjectives - <i>his, her</i> Articles - <i>a / an</i> (2)
Revision 1-3 Page 40	
Unit 4 Page 42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepositions of place - <i>in, on, under</i> Questions - <i>Where</i> (singular) Imperatives
Unit 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plural nouns

In view of the above, it seems relevant to base the teaching of ten-year-olds on language functions. However, informing a group of youngsters at the beginning of the class that today they will learn to talk about other people's age may not be the most engaging way of starting a class (it has to be admitted, though, that it is more attractive than telling them that today they will study the forms of 'be'). In order to get the students' minds focused on what is going to happen during the lesson, their curiosity should be raised. As we mentioned before, it is rather unlikely that we will find a group of ten-year-olds getting excited about the new grammar they will learn, but we can draw their attention to language form by presenting appealing content.

To this end, we would like to suggest an idea that we call the **circle of communication**. The class begins with a curiosity raiser, e.g. a quiz, which acts as an introduction to the language we want to study. Then students have sufficient language exposure in the form of listening or reading tasks and exercises, after which they should be ready to notice and draw correct generalizations as to how this language is used. Since the traditional deductive grammar learning has been rather ineffective, we believe that inductive grammar study may be the answer. We tend to remember what we discover on our own far better than what is simply given to us. Let's take a look at the following exercises:

2 Wpisz brakujące zdania do komiksu. Następnie posłuchaj i sprawdź.




Put the picture on the wall in the gallery. Oh no!

Act out the story

Source: *Evolution Student's Book*, p. 46, exercise 2, Macmillan Education 2012.

3 Ułóż zdania opisujące pokazane na obrazkach czynności, wykorzystując podane wyrazy.

- (X) the door _____
- (✓) my desk _____
- (X) your bag _____

- 4  (X) my pencil case _____
- 5  (✓) this ball _____
- 6  (X) the watch _____

Source: *Evolution Student's Book*, p. 47, exercise 3, Macmillan Education 2012.

In our example, students notice how to use the imperative because the examples they have been exposed to were sufficiently clear. Finally, students have a chance to use the functions they have studied in communicative tasks, such as the following "Have a talk" exercise.



4 W parach wydawajcie sobie polecenia i wykonujcie je. Go to the door!

Source: *Evolution Student's Book*, p. 47, exercise 4, Macmillan Education 2012.

The main idea is that no matter what our curiosity raiser is, the last stages of the lesson should be devoted to an active and communicative use of the functions studied in class.

To summarize, once we get our students' attention, our focus is to lead them through a series of stages, in which they're first exposed to language, then they notice the patterns, and finally use the new language in communicative contexts of their own. Basically, we believe that true communication begins with a function you want to express, not a structure you want to use. If you're lost in a new place, you need to know how to ask the way; few, if any people begin conversations because they want to use a particular language point.

Kinaesthetic Grammar – *Involving More than Eyes and Ears*

Obvious as it may seem, it needs to be stated that ten-year-olds are not adults and they experience the world in a way that is dissimilar to the way we do. Our students are kinaesthetically oriented and they appear to be constantly on the move. Of course teachers can't be still all the time either but it is hardly arguable that an average third/fourth-grader needs to be in motion more than a regular teacher. Yet when it comes to classroom treatment, there is peculiar asymmetry in how a moving teacher and student are perceived. When a teacher needs to stretch a little during class, she stands up and walks around

the room and it is called 'monitoring'. When a student does the same, it is identified as misbehaviour. The teacher insists that the student should sit down and listen and normally they do but ... usually only for a moment. We believe that instead of becoming frustrated, teachers might use the energy that keeps the students going to help them learn grammar. And at this point we would like to advocate a regular use of Grammar Flashcards. These are a simple yet effective method of providing the students with a chance to study grammar while having an opportunity to leave the chairs. Grammar Flashcards contain single or contracted words and do not have pictures drawn on them, unlike the Vocabulary ones. They also contain punctuation marks on the cards too. Below we wish to demonstrate several ways in which Grammar Flashcards can be used:

1 Kinaesthetic Word Order

A group of five students are each given a Grammar Flashcard with one of the following words: HAPPY / A / ARE / STUDENT / YOU and are asked to make a sentence. When the teacher shows a full stop they are to stand in a way that reflects a statement; when they see a question mark they have to reflect it with the way they stand. The movement of the pupils who are holding ARE and YOU demonstrates the idea of inversion both to the ones holding the cards and those observing them. This procedure can be repeated to revise the structure or to introduce any questions.

2 Contraction Introduction

Using Grammar Flashcards the teacher asks the students to create a negative sentence e.g. 'I do not like apples'. Then, another student with a 'DON'T' card is asked to find a place for himself or herself in the sentence.

3 Grammar Flashcard Testimony

Every student prepares a Grammar Flashcard sentence in which they say something about themselves. The cards are placed one after another and the students reveal the sentence word by word letting their classmates guess what the next word is going to be. This exercise is a grammar drill which makes the students repeat the structure they are learning several times.

4 Grammar Run

Students are divided into groups of at least 3. The teacher places a pile of Grammar Flashcards for each group on their desk. One of students is 'the writer' and stands by the board, another is 'the runner' and runs between the desk and the members of his

group bringing ONE grammar card at a time, the rest make sentences from the cards they get. When they make a sentence they show/dictate it to the writer. The first group to complete a correct sentence on the board wins.

The teacher does not need to have 25 years of experience to know that young students move a lot. It is up to the teacher to decide if she is going to struggle to make them sit in one place or if she is going to take advantage of the fact that students hate being stable and help them learn more effectively.

Evolution – not a revolution

Teachers who care love watching their students develop. However, what must be understood is that fourth-graders are at the very beginning of their journey towards level B1, which they are expected to achieve at the end of their upper-secondary education. According to *Nowa Podstawa Programowa*, students are supposed to be able to use basic and elementary language to create short texts consisting of a limited number of sentences at the end of grade six, that is at the end of their primary school education. This means that we are provided with a substantial amount of time to introduce language gradually and practise it thoroughly. Thus, teachers do not have to rush through several structures but can teach in a manner that supplies their students with multiple opportunities to focus on the basics necessary for effective communication. Consequently, the situation allows the teacher to start teaching by spending enough time on introducing and practising the most basic structures only to build on the knowledge later on.

Evo's grammar

What's your name?
My name's Evo.
What's ... = What is ...
My name's ... = My name is ...

Source: *Evolution Student's Book, Unit 1, p. 5, Macmillan Education 2012.*

Evo's grammar

How old is he?
How old is she?
He is ten.
She is ten.
Is he ten?
Is she ten?
Yes, he is.
No, he isn't.
Yes, she is.
No, she isn't.
No, he isn't. No, she isn't. = No, he is not. No, she is not.

Source: *Evolution Student's Book, Unit 2, p. 17, Macmillan Education 2012.*

Evo's grammar

It's Evo's pen.
Whose pen is it?
It's Evo's.
It's Joe's computer.
It's Joe and Lucy's computer.

Source: *Evolution Student's Book, Unit 3, p. 29, Macmillan Education 2012.*

We believe that the above is in keeping with the evolutionary nature of language. Outside the classroom, when children learn L1, they can express the same function in different ways depending on their age and linguistic competence. When a two-year-old kid is thirsty, she may say "Gimme" and many parents will be overjoyed; however, a ten-year-old's parents would probably expect a more developed utterance, such as "Can I have something to drink, please?" It seems we



accept different language at different stages of human development, and the same arguably should be the case in the classroom. Bearing this evolutionary aspect of language in mind, we need to realize time and time again that with ten-year-olds we are at the early stages of the evolution. As upper-primary teachers, we are the leaders guiding our students through the second stage of the process that is supposed to take our students to A1 level at the end of the 6th grade, which will allow them to approximate to A2 or A2+ level at the end of 'Gimnazjum' so that they can be taken to B1 or B2 level when they take their Matura.

This is good news because now Primary School teachers prepare their students to move to another stage - Gimnazjum where their knowledge of English is deepened so that they are ready to learn in an upper-secondary school. With *Nowa Podstawa Programowa* we have become a part of a greater scheme leading to a society in which most citizens speak English at a decent level. And all this based on an evolutionary process of gradual development rather than a revolution of flooding our students with grammar structures they are not capable of comprehending just yet. You may think we are dreamers but we're not the only ones - all that we trust that needs to be done is take things slowly as there is no need to rush.

Ten-year-olds are what they are: fidgeting individuals, who don't know what grammar is and need to be taught without unnecessary haste. They can't just sit in one place as we would like them to. They are not able to understand the meta-language so often used in grammar explanation. Finally, they learn things slowly, step by step. We are not suggesting a revolution. Instead we would like to propose teaching the way our students learn – functional-kinaesthetic evolution is what we need. So, are we going to let their English evolve at a natural pace while helping them develop? Sure, we are.

5th September, 2012

Kuba meets Bartek at their football practice. They run and kick the ball like there is nothing else in the whole world. After their coach's final whistle they go to change their training gear and chat on the way:

'Is the school as difficult as your sister said?' Kuba asks. 'A bit,' Bartek answers kicking the ball into the changing room. 'But nice too. I learnt today how to ask Wayne Rooney about his name when I meet him one day.'

'Cool. Do you know how to ask him about his age?' 'Not really. But I know I'll learn it tomorrow.' 

1 - 3



No data

4 - 6



A1

gimnazjum



A2 (A2+)

Liceum



B1 (B2)

References:

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Gardner, H. (2000). *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. Basic