

well and being praised for what we do, and this is especially true for young children. It is important to praise them if they are to keep their enthusiasm and feel successful from the beginning. If we label children failures, then they, believe us.

Eight to ten year olds* **General characteristics*

Children of five are little children. Children of ten are relatively mature children with an adult side and a childish side. Many of the characteristics listed above will be things of the past.,,

1. Their basic concepts are formed. They have very decided views of the world. They can tell the difference between fact and fiction.
2. They ask questions all the time.
3. They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning.
4. They are able to make some decisions about their own learning.
5. They have definite views about what they like and don't like doing.
6. They have a developed sense of fairness about what happens in the classroom and begin to question the teacher's decisions.
7. They are able to work with others and learn from others.

Language development

Eight to ten year olds have a language with all the basic elements in place. They are competent users of their mother tongue and in this connection they are aware of the main rules of syntax in their own language. By the age of ten children can:

- understand abstracts
- understand symbols (beginning with words)
- generalise and systematise.

This refers to children's general language development. When it comes to learning a foreign language, there is still a lot we do not know. There are many similarities



between learning one's mother tongue and learning a foreign language in spite of the differences in age and the time available. So far nobody has found a universal pattern of language learning which everyone agrees with. Much seems to depend on which mother tongue the pupils speak and on social and emotional factors in the child's background. What is clear here is that most eight to ten year olds will have some sort of language awareness and readiness which they bring with them into the foreign language classroom.

The period from five to ten sees dramatic changes in children, but we cannot say exactly when this happens because it is different for all individuals. The magic age seems to be around seven or eight. At around seven or eight, things seem to fall into place for most children and they begin to make sense of the adult world as we see it.

Think about young children telling jokes. Five year olds laugh because everybody else does, but they don't always understand the joke. If they are asked to re-tell the joke it will be nonsense. Seven year olds think jokes are funny and they learn them off by heart. This means that they often get the punch line wrong or have to be prompted. Ten and eleven year olds remember jokes and can work out the punch line from the situation. The system of language and the understanding of it seems to fall into place for many children in the same way.

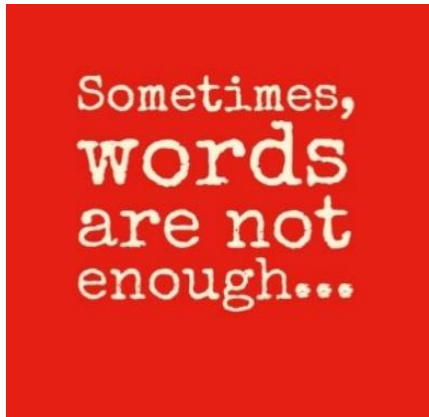
What this means for our teaching

Words are not enough

Don't rely on the spoken word only. Most activities for the younger learners should include movement and involve the senses. You will need to have plenty of objects and pictures to work with, and to make full use of the school and your surroundings. Demonstrate what you want them to do. The balance will change as the children get older, but appealing to the senses will always help the pupils to learn.

Play with the language

Let the pupils talk to themselves. Make up rhymes, sing songs, tell stories. Play with the language - let them talk nonsense, experiment with words and sounds: 'Let's go - pets go.' 'Blue eyes - blue pies.' Playing with the language in this way is



Sometimes,
words
are not
enough...

very common in first language development and is a very natural stage in the first stages of foreign language learning too.

Language as language

Becoming aware of language as something separate from the events taking place takes time. Most eight to ten year olds already have this awareness in their own language. The spoken word is often accompanied by other clues to meaning - facial expression, movement, etc. We should make full use of these clues. When pupils start to read, the language becomes something permanent and there are fewer other clues to meaning. Pupils can take a book home, they can read it again and again, they can stop, think about the language and work it out. The same is true of writing. So reading and writing are extremely important for the child's growing awareness of language and for their own growth in the language, although both are very demanding and take time and patience to learn.

Variety in the classroom

Since concentration and attention spans are short, variety is a must - variety of activity, variety of pace, variety of organisation, variety of voice. Older pupils can concentrate for longer periods and you should allow them to do so, but you still need lots of variety.

Routines

Children benefit from knowing the rules and being familiar with the situation. Have systems, have routines, organise and plan your lessons. Use familiar situations, familiar activities. Repeat stories, rhymes, etc.

Cooperation not competition

Avoid rewards and prizes. Other forms of encouragement are much more effective. Make room for shared experiences - they are an invaluable source of language work and create an atmosphere of involvement and togetherness. Most of us enjoy the feeling of belonging and this is particularly true of young children.

Group the children together whenever possible. This does not mean that they

