

IATEFL Conference 2023

Date: 19th April 2023

Venue: Harrogate Conference Centre: England

Website: <https://www.iatefl.org/conference/conference-programme>



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I'm presenting at
#IATEFL2023
Do's and don'ts in Young Learners'
pronunciation lessons
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Wednesday 19 April 2023

TIME: 14:10-14:40

**ROOM: Queen's Suite 6 -
Harrogate Convention Centre**



Some do's and don'ts in the young learners' pronunciation class

Pronunciation is one of the building blocks of learning languages. It is essential for listening and speaking, and it has its remarkable benefits in the realms of reading and writing. If it is so vital, why do many EFL teachers fear teaching pronunciation?

One of the reasons why teachers are not confident when teaching pronunciation may be the “overwhelming” meta-language associated with it. As students, we are taught to master the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a thorough description of vowels and consonants, the organs of speech and so forth. The problem appears when we it comes to teaching: we simply cannot transfer all this knowledge in the same way to our EFL class.

We know that every time we teach vocabulary or grammar the pronunciation of words should be taught as well and usually, young learners are spontaneously aware that English feels and sounds different from their mother tongue. In accordance with this, we show them how to articulate a sound by saying: “Put the tip of the tongue on the little mountain behind your teeth and say /d/.” Moreover, we use the IPA alphabet to illustrate this. Through this technique, our learners cannot be any farther from the acquisition of any sound. Their brains quickly become overloaded and blocked by the meta-language we use [Schmidt, 1993].

Children learn when they make sense of the tasks they perform and are physically active. Thus their brains release hormones like dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins which can improve concentration and focus. Therefore, we need to follow an approach that is compatible with the way children learn when we teach pronunciation. It is at this point when Phonics seems to fit in, as it trains learners to hear sounds in words without resorting to any form of metalanguage. So the letter 'A' is /æ/ and not /eɪ/ and so on. Phonics could be the most appropriate approach to teach pronunciation and spelling to young learners because it works with stories, fantasy characters that makes the sound-spelling relationship memorable, as well as songs and games. Yet there is a downside to it: this technique has been created for native speakers of English, who already know how to produce these sounds.

The major problem for non-native speakers is that they need to acquire the targeted sounds first. For example, a Spanish speaker will make no distinction V or B. So >Very< will be >Berry<, and here stands the much-needed “missing link”. For the non-native speaker, Phonics is another pointless procedure if it is conducted in the way it is presented to native speakers of the language. It logically follows that a child will simply not develop any phonological awareness if s/he keeps saying ‘Ban’ instead of ‘Van’, or ‘Berry’ for ‘Very’.

Here goes my suggestion: If stories are so powerful because they connect the narrative to emotions, we might as well use stories not only to make the sound spelling noticeable, but also to teach a new sound that non-native speakers do not have. Let me introduce the reader to ‘Emopron stories’, which regard as the “missing link” (Palavecino, 2022). This entails the use of a teaching tool that fosters acquisition of new sounds naturally. Children will remember what is anchored in laughter, fun and emotion. For example, the /v/ sound can be introduced through a story called ‘The Elves’ magic Moves’ (Palavecino, 2023). Through fantasy characters, children learn to make magic moves. By hugging the upper teeth with the lower lip, the Elves make magic moves to bring people together magically. The conflict is presented when the villain Dwarfs make the Elves fall and lose their upper teeth: the magic is lost. The magic move ‘vat a vat, vet a vet, vest a vet’ turns into ‘bat a bat, bet a bet, best a best’. In the story, the Tooth Fairy works his magic and sends the teeth back to the Elves’ mouth, and the magic is back. The Elves’ magic moves make more people join the move and they are happy. In the end, they forgive the villains and end up making the V moves all together. In this way, children will notice and naturally remember the place of articulation of both /v/ and /b/, and they will also remember the basic /b/-/v/ distinction. After the acquisition of a new sound, teachers can go on with the activities to relate sound to spelling, such as the ones introduced by phonics. But the “missing link” has been unveiled.

743 words

References

- Palavecino, S. (2022). 'Emopron stories: A Phonics Approach to Teach Pronunciation to Young Learners'. <https://emopronstories.com.ar>.
- Palavecino, S. (2023). 'The Elves' Magic Moves'. English House Editions.
- Schmidt, R (1993). 'Awareness and Second Language Acquisition'. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13.206-26.