

Questions from Early Years Webinar July 2020

What are your thoughts on learning through play?

Learning through play is essential. We all learn better if we are having fun whilst we do it, whatever age we are. Also if students are learning through play they will generally participate in an activity for longer and repeat it willingly. It does not always need to be a very complex activity - if teaching children to count to 5 then you could have them trying to throw and catch a beanbag 5 times, bounce a ball 5 times, play skittles with 5 pins etc. The role of the teacher is to cleverly set up play activities that encourage work on the objectives that they are trying to cover at the times. This could be theming your wet-play, physical activities and home corner suitably as well as using more teacher led activities alongside these. It is also important to allow some truly free play activities so that the children can just experiment and have fun whilst learning through discovery.

Do you think it is important to introduce books in Kindergarten? And why?

Absolutely. It is really important to get children to engage with books from a very early age. One of the key building blocks to a child becoming a confident and competent reader is for them to understand how stories work. The more books they are exposed to the more this develops. Studies have shown that pupils who struggle to read in primary school often come from homes where there are very few books and reading does not have an especially high status. It is the teachers role to try and make up for this shortfall. Books should be varied: picture books, stories, non-fiction, comics, e-books etc should all be used.

Can you assess a 5 year old through quizzes? And why?

That all depends on what you are trying to assess and why. A quiz might be suitable for simple summative assessment e.g. can they name colours, numbers, letters and so on but to really measure a child's understanding a teacher needs to observe them undertaking an activity and discuss with them the choices they made and why. Over time these more formative assessments will build to a much stronger picture of a child's strengths and areas for development.

What are your views on talk4writing by Pie?

I think a lot of the principles within Talk4Writing are very good. I agree with the basic ideas of the approach e.g. that children need the language of a particular topic to write about it (if they can't say it then they can't write it!), that writing needs to follow reading work on a variety of text types and that writing can be developed by going through several phases. In Talk4Writing these are imitation, innovation and invention. Talk4Writing is a commercial publication which provides teachers with resources to deliver the programme but teachers can easily create their own writing activities using the approach and there are several other publishers (including Pearson) who produce writing schemes which encompass many of the Talk4Writing principles.

When is a suitable time to introduce syllables? Are 3-4 year olds ready, especially when it is a second language?

I have worked very successfully with 4 year olds on programmes of systematic synthetic phonics teaching and as part of this I have introduced the idea of syllables. We clap them, tap them and count them. Young children are not put off by a long and difficult word like syllables (they handle words like tyrannosaurus without a problem) and their ear for the rhythm and cadence of words help them identify the syllables without them really realising that is what they are doing. Teaching of syllables should take place alongside learning how to blend and segment words into their phonemes (the shortest distinct unit of sound e.g. /s/ or /th/) which is the building blocks to learning to read and spell.

I don't feel that you would particularly hold back in teaching this when working in a second language. A child's capacity for language learning is strong at an early age but for those with English as a second language you might need to add in some extra practice and revision at the beginning to ensure that they are solid in their understanding.

What year/age is appropriate for blending in phonics?

What age are you introducing satpin? And why?

In England we introduce phonics in the first term of Reception when the children are 4 years old. This is the government recommended approach for England and is supported by a document called [Letters and Sounds](#). I start with /s/ as the first sound and then add in a new sound each day. As soon as we know three sounds, /s/, /a/ and /t/, we start to blend (co-articulate) these sounds together to make words. Alongside this I teach the children some of the common tricky words which don't blend phonetically but are going to be essential for reading (e.g. the, I, to). Once the children are confident blending orally with the first 12 sounds s/a/t/p/i/n/m/d/g/o/c/k I start to introduce phrases, sentences and short stories using just those sounds plus a few of the tricky words. I find that for the majority of children I work with introducing phonics at this age is very successful and by assessing the children's understanding regularly and can quickly pick up any who are struggling and do some immediate revision work with them so that they do not fall behind.

If I am working with much younger children or ones who are struggling to master the initial sounds then I do a lot of pre-phonics work with them. This includes work with listening and remembering sounds, rhythm and rhyme and alliteration before moving on to oral blending and segmenting and finally on to introducing the phonemes s/a/t/p/i/n.

Remember that with young children it is better to work on their letters and sounds in short focussed bursts and to keep any activities fast paced and engaging. When I am teaching phonics with young children I tend to limit the taught part of the session to just 10 minutes and cover listening, reading and writing. I then revisit/repeat the session later in the day and follow this with some carousel activities to support the teaching.

Should 2 year olds be allowed to use pencils for writing? And at what age should we focus on writing?

At the age of 2 I would not particularly be focussed on 'writing' in the traditional sense as most 2 year olds do not have the fine motor skills to write successfully. I would be concentrating more on activities which build these motor skills e.g. threading beads, colouring, joining dots, tracing letter shapes etc. I would do this with a variety of different tools including fingers, paint brushes, crayons and pencils and gradually move to finer work as their skills improve.

What are your thoughts on cursive handwriting and at what age should this begin at?

Schools have a range of different policies regarding cursive writing, some start teaching cursive as soon as they introduce writing whilst others leave it until children are a little older and only introduce cursive writing around 7 years old. When I am beginning to teach writing with children I focus more on them being able to master writing the single letter shapes consistently with correct orientation and clear ascenders and descenders. I do, though, teach children the letter shapes with their 'joins' so it easier for them to move to cursive writing when they are ready. Writing is a complex process and I feel it is important to ensure that children are mastering: pencil holding, letter and word spacing, letter size and letter shape before being too focussed on handwriting style. When working on writing activities always have in mind what the purpose of the activity is. Is the focus to impart meaning, practice spelling or show good presentation? This should guide your expectations for the work the children produce.

Could we introduce writing on sand before we move to pencil and paper?

Writing in sand is a good thing to do with young children as it builds a muscle memory of letter shapes - I use the plastic boxes from take-away meals to keep the sand in so that each child can have their own mini sand tray. My children also use string, cooked spaghetti, finger painting etc to practice forming letters before we move on to pens and pencils.

Teachers are worried about spelling mistakes in the early years than making the children think beyond. Spelling is essential as they move forward to IGCSE, how do we balance it? Since the spellings demotivate the student sometimes.

When working on writing activities always have in mind what the purpose of the activity is. Is the focus of the activity on accurate spelling? If it is then obviously children will need to spell the words correctly. But if the activity is more about writing down ideas or generating an interesting story then I would not be as concerned about accurate spelling as this will slow the child's flow of ideas and inhibit the writing process.

That said, accurate spelling is very important, particularly as the children move further up in the school so when I am teaching phonic blending to support a child's reading skills I always teach

this alongside oral segmenting to spell the word and writing to practice the letter shapes. If this approach is used from the beginning then children become accurate spellers of the words they know and have the skills to orally segment words to help them spell ones they don't already know.

What are your thoughts on online classes for kindergarten age students?

I have not personally undertaken much online teaching with children at kindergarten age but in my limited experience I have not found it a particularly effective process. I find that the children can become very easily distracted and are not able to focus on an online delivery for very long. What I have found, though, is that online resources which support the teacher and carousel activities which are completed on a computer or tablet can be very beneficial. I regularly use pictures, sounds, music, songs, models and images on the computer to support and enhance my teaching.

When working with young children the direct input from the teacher is so important. They are able to encourage discovery, support development, correct misconceptions and adapt activities in real time to ensure the child is getting the most benefit from activities. This is very hard to do when working remotely with young children.

Do you have any tips for teaching students with special needs at this age? And also for those who are exceeding expectations at this age?

This is a very broad question as the specific special needs will vary from child to child and in which subject area that they have the need. Is it emotional, physical, education etc?

So, in broadest terms, my advice would be focussed on excellent formative assessment supported by early and rapid intervention. If you have a clear understanding of what a child is capable of doing and where their difficulties lie then it is much easier for the teacher to target the support that they give to the child. I firmly believe that a 'mastery' approach to teaching is the most effective i.e. I do not move a child on to a new objective until they have mastered the previous one. If they have not mastered an objective then that tells me, as a teacher, that I need to give them more support, practice or a different approach. If you move on to a new objective before all your class are ready then you are risking leaving some of your children further and further behind and increasing the attainment gap between the most and least able.

I also apply this approach to children who exceed expectations. If I am sure that a child has mastered a particular objective before the rest of the class I don't accelerate them on to new objectives before the others instead I focus on the breadth and depth of that knowledge e.g. If I have a child who can consistently count to 10 accurately whilst the rest of the class are still learning it I will give them activities which ask them to count to ten in different ways, to find examples of groups of ten, to make their own counting activities up to ten, to treasure hunt for the numbers in order, to measure in units of ten, to learn new 10's counting songs etc.

Are there any supporting textbooks for EY?

We recommend Power Maths Reception to support our Maths strand. We will be publishing workbooks for English and The World Around Us in May next year. Early Bug Club readers work alongside the whole curriculum to promote a love of reading.

Are there any supporting teaching materials available?

iPrimary reception **includes** all of the lesson planning you could possibly need!

Any recommendations for textbooks for social science at this age?

The World Around Us includes social and creative development - including social studies, and the lesson planning and planned books will support this.

Are there going to be any activity books for use during the early year lessons?

The planned workbooks will support the teaching of the curricula.

When is this launching?

Right now! Talk to your local Pearson representative about iPrimary Reception!

Please may we have a bit more detail on the world around us,

The World Around Us supports Wellbeing and Social Development, Keeping Healthy, Physical Activity, Creative Arts, Early Science, Social Studies

Will this transition students well to yr 1?

It's designed specifically to support students in developing the skills and knowledge required for seamless transition to Yr1

Are there any plans for computing in the early years?

The World Around Us supports engagement with the digital world - but we are not planning a specific computing course for this age group at this point

How do we assess students online since most of the resources are photocopiable?

For very young students remote teaching and learning is a considerable challenge. The best advice would be to engage the parents and to do so via a video call. The iPrimary Reception assessments are based around a stimulus picture. This picture is discussed with the child and we provide questions that could be delivered by parents or carers - who could record and pass the answers to you. Or you could show the picture on screen, and discuss it that way with the child if they are able to utilise the technology this way.

Can this work alongside other reading schemes?

Yes

Is there any formal qualification/certification for students at EY?

No. This age is very much about learning to learn and taking important developmental steps.

Can teachers combine their innovative skills to teach or is this programme rigidly set in structure?

Teachers have total flexibility and can use the course however they want!

Do you have a specific observation sheet which will help us to be more consistent in observing our students?

This is a key part of the assessments. The curricula themselves also provide clear learning steps and we'd suggest having a copy for each student (not to share - for your reference!!) where you can mark off/date their achievements.

For pre-schoolers, do we have to give them the final paper test every term or year? or just evaluate their progress by observing their behaviour daily?

There's no requirement to give them the assessment - it's there if you want but you don't have to use it. It is *not* designed to be sat by a child without an adult present to support discussion.

How do you teach EY to students who have 1. Special needs, 2. Exceeds expectations?

For those that exceed expectations, we'd suggest looking at materials from the subsequent years and seeing how these can be incorporated as a stretch, or extension. Special needs support *very much* depends on the needs of the individual child. At this age most are not diagnosed. Normally you would attempt to keep the class together and give them the same opportunities and only diverge if this doesn't work. You could then provide extra support or guidance, including frames to support writing, breaking instructions down into small chunks, providing further visual support or prompts, or giving them a clear understood route for help. It is also important that any support like this is monitored and reviewed so as not to develop 'learnt helplessness'.

How many people can have access to this programme?

As many as you have!

Will this be added to our existing iPrimary platform?

And are there any additional costs? This will be added to the existing iPrimary platform, at no additional cost. It is part of our commitment to provide a major addition to the programme every year.

Professional Development for Early Years

Professional Development for Early Years is available now, please do talk to your local representative for more information regarding booking this. Please also talk to your local representative in relation to any other PD that your iPLS School would like, they will be able to advise on next steps.

Given the current global climate, all Face-to-Face training sessions have been suspended for the remainder of 2020, this will be assessed at the end of 2020/beginning of 2021 as to when Face-to-Face training sessions can resume. However, we are still delivering the same great quality Professional Development as part of the iPLS Subscription digitally. Please do contact your local Pearson Representative for more information.

