Teaching English to Young Learners: A Parallel Project-Based Syllabus

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The purpose of this article is to examine how a parallel syllabus may aid educators in their effort to teach young learners English as a foreign language. To achieve such a goal, it was chosen to create a parallel to the coursebook material project-based syllabus that comprises four lessons, all of which focus on the same topic. This theme-based syllabus aims at building various skills such as listening, writing, and speaking in tandem with integrating grammatical elements so that learners may eventually produce a piece of writing, more specifically a blog entry. All four lessons follow the same structure and include objectives that are to have been met by the time the project is complete and the students have produced their end product. The main reason behind choosing a project-based approach is that, on one hand, students learn to cooperate; on the other hand, projects are a great opportunity for cultivating learners' imagination and creativity through playful and engaging group activities. Upon completion, the students were asked to fill in self-assessment forms in order for the teacher to be able to assess each individual and their team work in a holistic and more productive way.

Keywords: project-based learning, multimodality, multiple intelligences, self-assessment, integrativeness, collaboration

Introduction

In today's global society it is essential that individuals learn to operate in different situations where the use of a foreign language is necessary for communication, be it in a bilingual household, in school via foreign language programmes as well as in the plurilingual community (Edwards, 2004, in Enever et al., 2014). As young learners strive to find their way in such multicultural environments, the need for creating suitable learning material has emerged so as to aid them in this creative journey. In that light, the coursebook has proven a useful ally in educators' attempts to provide a safe teaching environment, it is a source of practical ideas for students and it gives the latter purpose while learning (Halliwell, 1992, in Anastasiadou, 2020). However, coursebook material is not enough to support learning in a more naturalistic and student-centered way and for that reason teachers may need to resort to alternative means of educating young learners (Anastasiadou, 2020).

Therefore, a four-lesson parallel syllabus has been created to aid tutors in their effort to successfully teach English as a foreign language to young learners in a more creative way, and the rationale behind the creation of this material will be examined in order to elaborate on its suitability.

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Student Profile and Teaching Context

The class observed comprises four individuals (two male, two female) aged eight-nine attending primary school; language level is A1. Students at this level are able to comprehend and make use of everyday language clusters and lexical items to talk about very specific and concrete needs, they can make introductions about themselves, ask as well as answer basic questions regarding personal information and slowly interact using simple language with the guidance of a more experienced individual (Sifakis, 2004). It is a homogenous class consisting of individuals sharing common social and cultural backgrounds as well as the same mother tongue, which is Greek. The coursebook, #English 1, Express Publishing, 2021, consists of six modules which focus on teaching skills through integrating grammar and vocabulary. The material is based on the communicative approach and along with the textbook there are other components such as a grammar book, a workbook, a companion as well as an electronic version of them. This is a private foreign language school run by the teacher who holds a degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and has a 19-year experience working in the private sector teaching individuals of all levels. She is also responsible for selecting all material, as well as dealing with managerial and administrative issues.

Parallel Syllabus

Presentation, Description, Rationale

The parallel syllabus created (check appx.) is a theme-based (Homes/Rooms/Furniture) project which develops relevant vocabulary along with focusing on teaching listening/speaking/writing skills through the integration of grammar with the ultimate aim of aiding students in building their writing strategies so as to produce a specific genre (a blog entry). It consists of four 45-minute lessons; each lesson covers various objectives through different tasks and activities.

The choice of a topic-based project was established on the grounds that students are provided with context, content, and purpose through varied and creative activities (Halliwell, 1992; Vale & Feunteun, 1995, in Anastasiadou, 2020). Context gives learners a sense of understanding and enhances the development of cognitive and linguistic skills; content involves selecting topics closely related to individuals' preferences and personal experiences, that way urging them to collaborate and resort to problem-solving techniques and, finally, purpose entails providing students with a safe environment through the use of suitable tasks for them to be challenged and learn the language in a holistic way (Holderness, 1991, in Anastasiadou, 2020).

The creation of a project was based on the idea that such work can incorporate varied approaches as well as a combination of materials and tasks so as to connect mixed-ability learners and encourage them to be involved in working together using their imagination and different abilities to meet a common goal, that of attaining the desired language level (Fried-Booth, 2002, in Anastasiadou, 2020) along with presenting a creative end-product.

Lesson Structure

All lessons are structured in a similar way, introducing learners to the topic through varied activities which focus on building listening, speaking, and writing skills and integrate pertinent grammatical elements. It is worth noting that young learners are aided in acquiring language more easily when exposed to oral and aural material (Cameron, 2001; Moon & Nikolov, 2000; Nikolov, 2009; Pinter, 2006; Rixon, 1999; Slattery & Willis, 2001, in Giannakopoulou, 2016) and for that reason the lessons include such tasks. At this stage grammatical elements are taught implicitly through the use of thematic vocabulary and set phrases in order to form the basis for the

development of more complex strategies regarding later-on grammar acquisition (Ellis, 2005, in Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015). Lesson objectives include decision making, information receiving/transfer, developing thinking skills, to name a few, which will be thoroughly explained in the process. There is also integration of culture so as to boost acceptance of otherness and give students a better understanding of oneself (Coyle, 2005, in Dendrinos et al., 2017). The materials used are linked to the integration of multimodality (Elola & Oskoz, 2017, p. 57) in the classroom so as to introduce learners with authentic realistic material as well as boost listening and comprehension strategies to create a varied and entertaining environment (Allan, 1985, in Anastasiadou, 2020). Internet access opens up a new world of various sources of information thus creating autonomous users who are willing to explore their learning potential as they are exposed to realistic language all the while following their own individual pace (Haugland, 1992, in Enever et al., 2014). The use of artistic material is closely related to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences which presumes that human intellect is a combination of various types of intelligences (Gardner, 1999, in Griva et al., 2017). Class arrangement is also paramount in the sense that it assists the tutor in managing the project properly so as to create a better working environment and thus maximise results (Phillips, Burwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020).

Lesson 1

Lesson 1 acts as a project warm-up, introducing learners to the topic. It focuses on building speaking and listening skills while incorporating topic-related grammatical and lexical items. All material was extracted from the coursebook and was subsequently adapted to cover the needs of the lesson so as to create a more independent learning experience. The lesson starts with the teacher inviting students to recall familiar information. They are then presented with a video showing specific homes in more detail thus encouraging recognition to boost learning capability (Alexiou, 2009). The footage provides learners with authentic material and introduces them to relevant vocabulary all the while promoting values connected to culture (Alexiou & Kokla, 2018; 2019, in Anastasiadou, 2020). In terms of Gardner's multiple intelligences, watching a story supports the visual-spatial and musical types who tend to store information deriving from pictures, images, and sounds (Gardner, 1999, in Griva & Delligianni, 2017). Asking students to respond to pertinent questions facilitates the activation of schemata, which are abstract structures stored in memory (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980; Anderson & Pearson, 1988, in Williams & Moran, 1989, p. 217). Rewatching the video is an opportunity for students to elaborate on and process information so as to practice language (Tomalin, 1986, in Anastasiadou, 2020). The True-False activity that follows entails remembering and connecting pieces of information, thus activating decision making strategies.

Task 3 encourages students to express their personal opinion linking language use to their likes and dislikes. As well as that, it incorporates a Culture Corner to boost integrativeness, which is the will on the part of learners to see themselves as part of a different cultural community thus favouring character formation and motivating individuals to feel more engaged in the learning process (Gardner, 1979, in Enever et al., 2014).

The following task once again combines activating schemata with the theory of multiple intelligences as it is asked of students to resort to their artistic talent to produce a drawing, thus supporting the visual-spatial students as well as the intrapersonal ones, who prefer to operate individually (Gardner, 1999, in Griva & Delligianni, 2017).

The remaining two tasks entail the use of grammatical elements along with lexical chunks taught during the lesson, acting as consolidation stage all the while building memorability as it is easier for individuals to retain whole phrases (Porto, 1998, in Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015).

Lesson 2

The second lesson introduces learners to the project and acts as the planning stage. At this point, the teacher works with the individuals to establish the project aim and content as well as make predictions as to what is expected of them to finally produce (Fried-Booth, 2002, in Anastasiadou, 2020).

The first task presents individuals with a topic-related video cartoon story extracted online so as to boost speaking in familiar context as well as enhance listening skills with the help of visual stimuli, which elements also create a varied and entertaining learning environment (Allan, 1985, in Anastasiadou, 2020), especially for the visual-spatial and musical students.

Moving forward to the next step, the learners are given the drawing kit so as to make their own artistic version of an ideal house, resorting to prior visual and aural stimuli in order to recall information and make decisions based on their preferences. Once again the notion of Gardner's multiple intelligences is present, as the visual-spatial types as well as the intrapersonal ones (Gardner, 1999) feel more at ease working in such conditions. This task is also helpful in the sense that students may make predictions of what might be expected of them to create as an end-product.

Next, students are asked to connect mentally their work and previously acquired vocabulary knowledge with grammatical structures to produce language orally. Lexical chunks are used in context and grammar is taught implicitly via the formation of pertinent phrases, which boosts cognitive development (Alexiou & Mattheoudakis, 2015). Furthermore, this task acts as a reflective one; knowledge is constructed through experience (Kolb, 1984, in Selby, 1999, in Nikolov, 2007) so as to create autonomous and imaginative individuals (Calderhead & Gates, 1993, in Selby, 1999, in Nikolov, 2007).

At the end of the lesson, learners are finally introduced to the topic of the project and are explained what is expected of them to produce; rules are established, duties are delegated, instructions are given (Phillips, Burnwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020). They are also asked to brainstorm and make use of their imagination in order to be aided in coming up with creative ideas.

It is worth noting that during the lesson, students should be allowed to interact and use their native language when involved in creative activities (Phillips, Burnwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020) and the tutor should act as monitor so as to encourage learner autonomy.

Lesson 3

This is the stage at which the project is implemented and the end-product is created in class. First, all material is gathered and class is arranged accordingly so as to create optimal conditions for the project to be manageable (Phillips, Burnwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020). With the help of a computer and internet access, the tutor encourages the students to do research online and find the essentials in order to use them in their work; thus, learners make use of authentic material. At the same time, cooperation is facilitated and decision-making strategies are activated. The class work together to create a "My crazy house" poster and resort to various skills and strategies: group work, class collaboration, delegation of duties, making choices, using one's creativity, role-assumption; All these elements create a holistic learning experience, an important factor of the modern classroom environment which should target learner autonomy. Gardner's visual-spatial, intrapersonal, and interpersonal types of students (Gardner, 1999) are also encouraged when working on the project.

When the end-product is ready, it is pinned to the wall and learners are asked to present their work orally, which acts as a follow-up task aiming at identifying any linguistic needs that may not have been present in the previous stages (Phillips, Burnwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020).

Lesson 4

The last lesson starts with the students making an oral presentation of the end-product, which acts as a warm-up task; its scope is to consolidate previously acquired knowledge and prepare students to build writing skills. Group presentation entails assigning roles and making decisions, elements which encourage learner autonomy and boost self-confidence.

The teacher can choose to either hand out the writing piece outline (check appx.) or write the information on the board so as to make the lesson more interactive, depending on time availability and class ability. Once the information becomes available, the tutor explains what is expected of learners to produce, all the while allowing class interaction so that individuals feel motivated to actively participate; the role of the teacher is to encourage word-recall and meaning construction so as to boost literacy (Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013). The lesson mainly focuses on process writing, however it should be noted that learners are required to understand the specific writing genre (a blog entry), as curriculum constraints demand that individuals be familiarised with the genre approach from early learning stages. Process writing entails familiarising learners with form and procedure while at the same time it considers student needs and language level (Hedge, 1994, in Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013, p. 12). Individuals are given information on what to write, to whom, and how; there is purpose for writing (for the school magazine), a specific audience (schoolmates) and they are given context (a school magazine) (Hedge, 1988; Byrne, 1988; White & Arndt, 1991, in Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013, p. 12) so as to collaborate and produce a specific genre (a blog entry). Although the genre approach may remove itself from learner-centeredness and does not value the effort on the part of the writer to resort to cognitive strategies so as to create a piece of writing (Harbord, 2005, in Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013), it should be noted that it asks learners to make a conscious attempt and put to use strategies that comply with the social norms that the given discourse community, that is the text audience and individuals comprising the same reading and writing environment (Barton, 2007, in Hyland, 2015) dictates; in that light, students learn to recognise their audience, follow the rules of discourse and how these apply to the reading community (Hyland, 2002, in Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013). The choice to focus on process writing could be explained in terms of supporting students in their struggle to acquaint themselves with text organisation as well as their activating transfer skills so as to build writing (Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013). All previous lessons were built to guide learners through this cyclical mode of going back and forth, subconsciously collecting language and information while involved in the tasks. The objective seems clear; emphasis is placed on performance, especially on whether the lessons created were successful in encouraging individuals to improve their writing (Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013). During the in-class writing activity, the tutor's role is to monitor students and provide assistance when needed: help learners redraft and revise and finally edit their work so as to eventually share it with the rest of the class (Emig, 1971, in Lavidas & Alexiou, 2013).

Reading their work out loud to their classmates gives learners a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, they become fluent and develop language automation skills (Giannakopoulou, 2016).

At the end of the lesson, the educator distributes student self-assessment cards (check appx.) and urges individuals to assess themselves for both to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Further elaboration on

the role of self-assessment as well as on how and why students are assessed by the teacher is included in the following section.

Project Work and Student Assessment

Evaluation of project work seems to be a challenging task since both the process and the product should be taken into account, which entails teacher-student collaboration so as to contemplate on how fruitful everyone's efforts have been and if the method adopted and the materials used have been successful in shaping more self-aware and independent students (Phillips, Burnwood, & Dunford, 1999, in Anastasiadou, 2020). In that light, the tutor chose to follow the process of student self-assessment and then, when the project was over, it was decided to use student assessment cards to examine in more detail further aspects of the teaching-learning experience.

Assessing young learners may prove difficult in the sense that individuals have only just begun learning, each of them works and learns at a different speed and there might be discrepancies linked to cognitive and conceptual issues (Anastasiadou, 2020). Self-assessment was chosen on the grounds that students were given the opportunity to make their own decisions regarding the thinking and learning strategies they employed, it gave them a sense of active involvement in the learning process, they became more self-aware so as to mark their own progress and eventually focus on improving language performance (Anastasiadou, 2013, in Anastasiadou, 2020).

Keeping record of student performance via the use of student assessment cards is an alternative means of following individual as well as class progress; it involves the teacher assuming the role of class monitor who provides students with suitable learning tasks and material so as to eventually evaluate performance during an extended period of time, thus judge learning outcomes in a more learner-centered and holistic way (Anastasiadou, 2020).

Conclusion

It is safe to say that, in order to offer a suitable learning environment for young individuals to enjoy a holistic experience, it is essential to create a variety of tasks and activities as well as resort to varied material to cover student needs and interests and cater to the learners' different capabilities; and even though modern textbooks provide such opportunities by also placing emphasis on more naturalistic and child-centered approaches to learning, the need for implementing supplementary material is of paramount importance (Anastasiadou, 2020). Thus, a topic-based class project makes for the correct choice by allowing for a wide range of activities to be used, which activities are carried out individually and/or in a group, by enabling goal-setting techniques and, last, by boosting class dynamic via encompassing theory and practice to support continuous experiential learning (Legutke & Thomas, 1991, in Anastasiadou 2020). It is via this creative implementation of such methods that individuals are guided through their journey of discovering the benefits of learning a second language. At the same time, they are given the essentials so as to develop their creativity, confidence, and self-reliance.

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Appendix

Parallel Syllabus: Class Project "My Crazy House"

Topic: Homes/Rooms/Furniture
Lessons: 4
Duration of each lesson: 45 minutes
Project aim: writing skills: a blog entry

Lesson 1: Topic Introduction/Project Warm-Up

Skills	Listening/speaking
Grammar	There is/there are, prepositions of place
Vocabulary	Homes/furniture/rooms
Lesson objectives	Listen for specific information Transfer information Develop thinking skills Express opinion Make choices Practise vocabulary for parts of the house/rooms Practise there is/there are Design/draw a house Language across cultures Individual work Group work Give personal information
Culture	UK homes and their names
Materials	Laptop/PC, IWB, projector internet access, board, A3 coloured paper, colouring pens/pencils
Class arrangement	Big rectangular table, chairs round the table (or: desks form a rectangular, students sit around it)

Lesson plan

Task 1 (5 minutes)	Write the names of the three houses on the board: *The Burrow*, *Bag End*, *Fowl Manor*. Watch the video "Fantastic Fictional Homes" (extracted from: #English 1, module 1, lesson 4). Ask where each house is.
Task 2 (5 minutes)	Write the names of the books/films on the board. Ask students if they know any of them. Rewatch the video. Read the sentences out loud and have students decide if the information is True or False: • The Weasley's house has got seven floors • Artemis has got a lot of books • Fowl Manor has got round windows • Bag End hasn't got any stairs • Mrs. Weasley has got a flying car • Artemis' bedroom is small
Task 3 (10 minutes)	Express opinion: Ask students which house is the most unusual to them and why. Learn about UK culture: Write on the board: *Cottages are small houses in the English countryside. Are there similar houses in your country?* Have a student read it out loud. Explain it to the class preferably in L2. Get the students to answer.
Task 4 (15 minutes)	Write the words on the board: *basement, bathroom, master bedroom, dining room, living room, garage, child's bedroom, living room, kitchen, balcony, roof, wall, door, garden, ground floor, first floor.* Explain unfamiliar words, preferably in L2. Give students the A3 coloured paper and the drawing kit and have them work together to create a house that contains the rooms/places written on the board and pieces of furniture (already taught).
Task 5 (5 minutes)	Pin the drawing on the wall/board. Ask students questions about each room; use *there is/there are* and *prepositions of place*. Examples: *where is the kitchen? is there a sofa in the bathroom?* etc.
Task 6 (5 minutes)	Get the students to make short statements and speak about their house/favourite room using *there is/there are*, *prepositions of place*.

Material/ideas extracted from: #English 1, Module 1, Lesson 4, Jenny Dooley, Express Publishing, 2021.

Lesson 2: Project Introduction/Planning

Skills	Listening/speaking
Grammar	There is/there are, prepositions of place
Vocabulary	Homes/furniture/rooms
Lesson objectives	Listen for specific information Transfer information Develop thinking skills Express opinion Make choices Vocabulary consolidation: parts of the house/rooms/furniture Grammar consolidation: there is/there are, prepositions of place Design/draw a house Individual work Group work Give personal information Class collaboration Delegate responsibilities Assign roles
Materials	Laptop/PC, IWB, projector, internet access, board, A4 coloured paper, colouring pens/pencils.
Class arrangement	Big rectangular table, chairs round the table (or: desks form a rectangular, students sit around it).

Lesson plan

Task 1 (10 minutes)	Watch the video: "Kids vocabulary—[Old] House—Parts of the House—English educational video". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9intHqlzhc (extracted from *YouTube* channel: English Singsing). Ask questions about parts of the house/rooms/furniture. Examples: *What colour is the roof? Where is the door? Is there a garden? etc*.
Task 2 (10 minutes)	Hand out the A4 sheets of paper and the drawing materials. Have students work individually to create their own/ideal house, rooms, and furniture.
Task 3 (15 minutes)	Get students to make an oral presentation of their house individually making use of *there is/there are* and *prepositions of place*. Ask them which is their favourite room.
Task 4 (10 minutes)	Introduce the project topic: "My Crazy House". Collaborate with kids and delegate roles/responsibilities. Draw lots and assign each student a room/rooms. Have the students think of the crazy house and ask questions. Examples: *Where is the kitchen? Is there a bath in the living room? Is there a table under the sofa? etc*.

Lesson 3: Implementation/Creation of end-product

Skills	Speaking
Grammar	There is/there are, prepositions of place
Vocabulary	Homes/furniture/rooms
Lesson objectives	Transfer information Exchange information Develop thinking skills Express opinion Make choices Vocabulary consolidation: parts of the house/rooms/furniture Grammar consolidation: there is/there are, prepositions of place Create a poster Do research online Individual work Group work Class collaboration Delegate responsibilities Assign roles Boost creativity/inventiveness Use authentic material ICT
Materials	Laptop/PC, internet access, A3 coloured paper, colouring pens/pencils, glue, scissors, printer, magazine(s)
Class arrangement	Big rectangular table, chairs round the table (or: desks form a rectangular, students sit around it).

Lesson plan

Step 1 (15 minutes)	Form a group with the students. Do online research; find pictures of rooms/furniture. Have students select their favourite one(s). Print them. Or: Browse through (a) magazine(s); find pictures of rooms/furniture. Have students select their favourite one(s). Cut them out.
Step 2 (15 minutes)	Get students to work in a group. Have them create a "My Crazy House" poster. Encourage them to cooperate and have them decide; who does what, which room goes where, how to arrange the poster, etc. Monitor the class. Remind them to make free random/illogical/crazy choices.
Step 3 (15 minutes)	Once the students are finished, help them pin the poster to the wall. Get them to talk about the end product; have them all describe the crazy house using the previously taught vocabulary and grammar. They can stand up if they prefer. Ask questions and give information in L2 preferably.

Lesson 4: Presentation of end product: Writing: a blog entry—Work Assessment

Skills	Writing/speaking
Grammar	There is/there are, prepositions of place
Vocabulary	Homes/furniture/rooms
Lesson objectives	Transfer information Develop thinking skills Express opinion Make choices Vocabulary consolidation: parts of the house/rooms/furniture Grammar consolidation: there is/there are, prepositions of place Write an entry for the school blog about the class project "My Crazy House" Individual work Group work Class collaboration Delegate responsibilities Assign roles Boost creativity/inventiveness Use authentic material Self-assessment Project work: student assessment
Materials	Poster, board, notebooks, pencils, assessment cards.
Class arrangement	Big rectangular table, chairs round the table (or: desks form a rectangular, students sit around it).

Lesson plan

Task 1 (10 minutes)	Have the students work together and make an oral presentation of the project. Get them to choose who says what in which order.
Task 2 (10 minutes)	Teach writing in class: Make a plan of the blog entry on the board (check appx. II) Guide students through the plan; explain the information: What to write, to whom, how.
Task 3 (15 minutes)	Write a blog entry in class: Have the students complete the writing task individually in class. Monitor their work and help them when necessary.
Task 4 (5 minutes)	Have them read their work out loud individually.
Task 5 (5 minutes)	Hand out the self-assessment cards (check appx. III) and get students to assess themselves.

Information for the teacher: The "Project Work: Student Assessment Card" is to be filled by the teacher after the completion of the project, in class or after the lesson.

Writing: A Blog Entry for the School Magazine

Outline

Introduction: *Start with:*

                     Hi guys! My name/nickname is.... This is "My Crazy House" class project!

Main body: How many rooms are there? Which rooms?

                     What's your favourite room?

                     What is there in your favourite room?

Conclusion: *end with:*

                     Well, this is my awesome class project! What about yours?

                     Say goodbye with your name/nickname.

Student Self-assessment Card

I can	:)	:/	:(
Watch a video about houses			
Create a poster about a crazy house			
Talk about my own/ideal house			
Write about my crazy house			
Work alone			
Work with my classmates			