

CREATING A PROPER ENGLISH TEACHING/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:
data from a daycare in Brazil.

This paper presents introductory data from the POACE Project (Promoting Oral Awareness and Communication in English) which aims at teaching English to under-5-year-old children at the daycare from the state university *campus* of *Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia – UESB*, Bahia, Brazil. Being aware that the increasing discussion about the role(s) of English in the world today has reinforced the tendency that its teaching take place earlier and earlier during childhood (ROCHA, 2007), even though there's no consensus about this precociousness as the author states, this project intends to contribute with the discussion about the ideal age for children to start learning an additional language, and also, evaluate whether the participants in this study demonstrate any kind of resistance to learning English at this age.

The project has 1-weekly hour at the daycare, and these meetings alternate PA (Planned activities) and RA (Routine activities) meetings. This later was thought to be an essential moment for the team to be in contact with the kids in their everyday routine; a moment for children and instructors to interact in a non-controlled context. These moments also represent additional hours of contact between the POACE team and the children, what has contributed to ease the approach as the children feel more and more comfortable with the team that runs the project. The proposed approach may bring some kind of discomfort to the kids and to the daycare staff manifested by inhibition, unwillingness to participate in the activities, or a general antipathy to the project team. Having this in mind, in order to build up an auspicious and friendly environment for the teaching and learning process to take place, the team cares that children feel totally secure and confident to demonstrate what they have been learning in audible perceptive performance and to spontaneously react positively to the interaction promoted by the instructors who try to communicate with them exclusively in English (“só-inglês” interaction). Therefore, respect and patience to each ones time, willingness to participate, personal space, use of kind tone of voice, promotion of fun and calm atmosphere are the principals in the meetings. Also, to help guarantee the atmosphere of comfort and confidence the daycare teachers and helpers remain in class during the whole PA and RA meetings. All the registers are made on field notes.

Promoting the discussion about the teaching and learning of a foreign/additional language to young children, the project has brought, among others, the contributions of: Vygotsky (1998) for understanding these two processes in a context where it is evident its inextricable connection, and this phenomenon reinforces the idea that the building of knowledge in these processes take place during/in the interaction; of Rocha (2007; 2007a) for a rich discussion also about the good interaction and the importance of learning languages (English) during early ages in Brazil; and Cameron (2001) for clear guidelines on teaching English to young learners.

The findings have showed so far that the feeling of confidence being built between the participants and the POACE Project instructors plays an essential role on the perceptive (audible or gestural) demonstration of comprehension and learning of the content being taught at that daycare.

Keywords: English teaching/learning; Confidence; Young learners.

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