



Výuka anglické slovní zásoby u dětí předškolního věku pomocí různých výukových strategií

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Autor práce: **Kateřina Zajícová**
Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Renata Šimůnková, Ph.D.





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Teaching English Vocabulary to Very Young Learners Using Various Teaching Strategies

Bachelor thesis

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Author: **Kateřina Zajícová**
Supervisor: Mgr. Renata Šimůnková, Ph.D.



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Jméno a příjmení: **Kateřina Zajícová**
Osobní číslo: **P10000437**
Studijní program: **B7507 Specializace v pedagogice**
Studijní obory: **Český jazyk a literatura se zaměřením na vzdělávání**
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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Mgr. Renata Šimůnková, Ph.D.

Katedra anglického jazyka

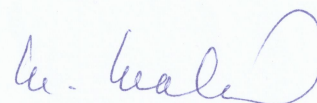
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doc. RNDr. Miroslav Brzezina, CSc.
děkan

L.S.



PhDr. Marcela Malá, M.A., Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

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Anotace

Bakalářská práce „Výuka anglické slovní zásoby u dětí předškolního věku pomocí různých výukových strategií“ pojednává o tom, jak je nezbytné znát specifika výuky předškolních dětí. V další části se rozebírají možnosti výuky slovní zásoby pomocí poslechu a mluvení. V neposlední řadě je kladen důraz na hry, jakožto nedílná součást učebního procesu.

V praktické části jsou navrženy aktivity zaměřené na slovní zásobu s ohledem na věk dětí a popis jejich provedení v praxi. Cílem těchto aktivit je procvičení dané slovní zásoby a získání nezbytných vědomostí o konkrétních slovíčkách. Následuje pozorování těchto aktivit, popřípadě návrh případných zlepšení. Dosažení očekávaných cílů bylo ověřeno lektorem, který zaznamenával, zdali si žáci slovní zásobu lépe pamatují. Následně byl ještě proveden test. Navrhované aktivity pomohly dětem k řádnému osvojení si slovní zásoby.

Klíčová slova

Předškolní věk, slovní zásoba, poslech, mluvení, hra

Abstract

Bachelor thesis “Various techniques in teaching English vocabulary to very young learners” is about the necessity to know the specifics of teaching preschool children. The next aspect is discussing about the possibility of teaching vocabulary through listening and speaking. Finally, the emphasis is on games, as an inseparable part of the learning process.

The practical part consists of the suggested activities focusing on vocabulary with regard to childrens' age and a description of those activities during a teaching practice. Afterwards there is an observation. The aim of these activities is to practice the vocabulary and acquire the necessary word knowledge. Afterwards there is an observation of these activities, some improvements were suggested. Whether pupils have achieved the expected aim was verified by teacher’s observation and the achievement test. Proposed activities help children to remember vocabulary better.

Key words

Very young learners, vocabulary, listening, speaking, game

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Introduction

I have chosen this topic as a result of my great interest in this area. I work as a lecturer in the language school FAN in Turnov where I specialized on teaching very young learners.

A new trend, teaching English to very young learners, appeared in the last couple of years. Many kindergartens and other language facilities started to run courses for pupils at this age. Teaching vocabulary to very young learners is not only about knowing how to teach English, but also about knowing characteristics of this particular age group, their skills and abilities.

This thesis is written in order to understand my readers who very young learners are and how to teach them English vocabulary through listening and speaking skills and games.

The bachelor thesis will be consisted of two parts: theoretical and practical part. The theoretical part is providing a general look into description of very young learners. In the next chapters the focus is on vocabulary and how it is taught. A special emphasis is put on games and their importance as a part of the learning process.

The aim of the thesis is to suggest games for very young learners. What follows is a description of those game and an observation. At the end of each game I would like to present results of an achievement test which was taken after the games.

In conclusion I will briefly summarize my thesis, suggested games and their observation, and the results of achievement tests.

Theoretical part

1 Very young learners

1.1 Definition of very young learners

It used to be generally thought that teaching English as a second language to very young children is not only waste of time and energy, but also money. As the past tense signals, those times are far away from today.

It is generally known that pupils have to start learning a second language in the 3rd grade in the Czech republic. However courses for younger pupils, even for those who have not started school yet, are offered in many learning facilities nowadays. When children begin with learning English in kindergarten, they have a great advantage over those who start at the 3rd grade. They are familiar with the language, they are used to speak and hear English and they have already learnt a lot of vocabulary and phrases.

When starting teaching very young learners, the first thing to realize is who they are and what they are capable of. This term can cover children from 3 years old to 7 years old, according to the definitions, as will be seen later. The teacher needs to know what he should expect and what should be expected because this group is very specific in many ways.

In order to work with children at this age a teacher needs to have a general knowledge of the development differences, what is typical for the children and how do they learn. To help the teacher understand those differences, there are two lists of characteristics. Firstly, a general characteristic of very young children and secondly, characteristic of them as learners. Understanding those characteristics the teacher should have at least the slightest idea about how to teach very young learners.

Many specialists in this field, such as Reilly and Ward, Halliwell, Scott and Ytreberg, Křížková, Těthalová recommend starting learning a second language as soon as possible. Although they all agree on this, their opinions on the term very young learners differs according to the country and context.

The term very young learners means, according to Reilly and Ward (1997: 3):

“Very young learners are children who have not yet started compulsory schooling and have not yet started to read. It means children between age of three and six. The children may be attending state or private nursery schools and they can learn English at school as the part of the school curriculum or during private lessons outside the school.”

Equally important is an opinion of Scott and Ytreberg (1990), who divided children into two groups – the five to seven year olds and the eight to ten year olds.

In like manner Slattery and Willis (2001: 4) claim:

“Because children show different characteristics at different ages, we sometimes make a distinction between very young learners (VYLs) aged under 7 years, and young learners (Yls) aged 7 to 12.”

Despite these age specifications, it is absolutely necessary to consider the child's level of development. Children of the same age may vary in a significant way. In other words, an important factor is how mature the children are. Each child needs a different amount of time to acquire new skills and abilities, they learn in their own speed. Moreover, Pinter (2006) thinks that the surrounding, such as the culture or educational context, may or may not always be supporting.

Likewise Reilly and Ward (1997: 3) believe:

“What counts more than chronological age is the developmental age. This will vary according to the individual and the help and encouragement he or she has already received, either at home or in the nursery.”

In conclusion, there are several differences in terms very young learners and young learners. The most obvious is their age although it is not the most accurate one. What is important is the developmental age.

This thesis will be dealing with children no younger than 3 years old and under seven years old. Those children have not started a compulsory school and they have not acquired reading and writing skills yet. They might be attending a preschool facility though.

Understanding what the term very young learners means, it is important to know how to handle those pupils.

1.1.1 Characteristic of very young children

As mentioned above, very young children have a specific set of skills and abilities, which help them in their learning process. This set may vary from child to child and the older they are, the greater those skills and abilities can become, therefore each year in child's development counts.

Halliwell (1994: 3) identifies very young children:

- young children are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words
- already have great skill in using limited language creatively
- in most cases they learn indirectly rather than directly
- take great pleasure in making fun in what they do
- have extraordinary imagination

- more importantly they take great delight in talking

Scott and Ytreberg (1990: 2) add what five to seven year olds can do:

- they can say what they are doing
- they can talk about what they have done, heard or seen
- they can plan activities
- they can argue for something and support their arguments
- they can use logical reasoning
- they can use their vivid imaginations
- they can use a wide range of intonation patterns in their mother tongue
- they can understand basic human interaction

1.1.2 Characteristic of very young children as learners

It should be kept in mind that even though the children are at the same age and their characteristic is very similar, their preferences as learners might be different.

The following points attempt to summarize features of the very young learners according to Pinter (2006), Reilly and Ward (1997), Slattery and Willis (2001), and Halliwell (1994). They share the same opinion in that:

- they have a very short attention and concentration span thus activities need to be changed every five to ten minutes
- they are more concerned about themselves than others
- they are self-centred and may often want to play alone or may not want to cooperate with the group
- they have limited reading and writing skills for this reason it is important to recycle new words and expressions through talk and play

- they are able to follow a story, predict what might come next and ask follow-up questions, furthermore, they enjoy looking at books and will often pretend they are reading the text, even when they cannot decode the individual words
- they have a limited knowledge about the world
- they enjoy fantasy, imagination and movement therefore they use their imagination to invent their own stories, however, they find it hard to separate fantasy and reality
- their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears, as a result, they acquire through hearing and experiencing lots of English, in much the same way they acquire their first language
- their grammar will develop gradually on its own, provided they hear lots of English and learn to understand a lot of words and phrases, they use language skills before they are aware of them
- they are comfortable with routines and enjoy repetition
- they need to recycle new language through play and talk
- they understand meaningful messages but cannot analyse language yet
- they have a great need for communication and are less shy to speak
- they are less afraid to make a mistake than older students or adults

Knowing childrens' abilities, skills and needs should help the teacher to understand how to work with very young learners.

Even though those points are considered to be a description of very young learners in general, do not forget the fact, that every child is unique and therefore might need a different approach.

If the demands on the children are too big, they will lose all their interest in English and the lesson will be unsatisfactory. The same happens if the children are underestimated because the tasks are not challenging enough. The teacher needs to find a way to satisfy the childrens' potential.

During my teaching experience, I found the knowledge of the development differences rather useful. It helped me to understand my pupils, to make my lessons interesting for them and to prepare activities appropriate to their abilities.

1.2 Classroom language

To help very young learners get used to a new language, it is essential to use the language as much as possible, because for some of them, the class is the only place they can hear English. It is important for them to accustom the language and accept it as a part of their life so later on they will not feel intimidated to use it.

What better way to assimilate them with English than through instructions given in the class, organization, greetings etc. This is the kind of indirect learning, which very young learners prefer over direct learning, as was mentioned in the characteristic.

1.2.1 Giving instructions

Giving instructions in English is a great way to present the language in one of the most realistic communicative situations in which the learners find themselves. Moreover, the necessity to switch to the mother tongue will be reduced. Children can pick up a lot of phrases during the class and after some time they might use them themselves. Phillips (1994) recommends that those instructions should be short and accurate.

Every teacher uses a different set of instructions. A lot of them are the same, such as *sit down, use a pencil, let's make a circle*, the rest might differ for each teacher. It is important though to keep the same set of instructions for each class.

For example, if the teacher usually says: "*Let's sit at the table*" then it should not be changed into for example "*Please, go to your seat and sit down*". The meaning of the phrase is the same but the interpretation is not. The children understand what *Let's sit at the table* means but they do not know that *Please, go to your seat and sit down* is the same, unless the teacher tells them that.

It is suggested to use the same phrases over and over again so the children get used to them and when they feel comfortable, they even use some of them themselves. This way, they learn new vocabulary phrases without realizing it.

Some teachers tend to keep a list of the most common phrases to make sure they keep using the same. My list is presented in the practical part of this thesis.

1.2.2 Avoiding using the mother tongue

Children usually do not have the necessity to translate every word they hear into their mother language if they have the opportunity to catch the meaning in a different way.

As it was already mentioned, they have a great ability to understand the main idea of what is being said even though they might not understand every detail.

Since the pupils do not know practically any English words and the teacher should use as much English as possible without translating, the meaning of what is being said needs to be expressed somehow. One way to do that is to support the language by gestures, actions and mimics. Hennová (2010) recommends not to translate the word for children, but use pictures, gestures, real objects or other visual materials instead.

The learners might use their first language because they are not able to contribute in the foreign language. A teacher should respond in English though and gently encourage them to use the target language. (Reilly and Ward, 1997, Phillips, 1994, Halliwell, 1994)

On the other hand, it can happen, that the teacher does everything he or she can trying to explain some instructions in English, children still do not understand. In that case, they might get frustrated and lose their interest. Instead of using the foreign language at all costs, it should be considered to just translate it into the mother tongue. Some specialists, such as Selby (2006) says:

“It is almost impossible to avoid using some mother tongue in the classroom with such young children as they have many physical and emotional needs to be addressed while they are learning.” (Selby, 2006: 12)

To support what was said, I would like to share my experience. In the second half of the school year, I met one of my very young learners in a department store shopping with her mother. The mother was greeting me in her language, the child, however, said Hello in English and it seemed she did not even have to think about it.

In conclusion, teaching very young learners does not only mean to learn them some vocabulary and play games in English. The teacher should be familiarized with basic characteristics of children at this age and know what he or she can afford and what are these children capable of.

Knowing those characteristics, I got a general knowledge about what activities to choose for very young learners and I was able to suggest some suited for very young learners, as can be seen in the practical part of this thesis.

2 Vocabulary

“Words of a language are just like bricks of a high building; despite quite small pieces, they are vital to the great structure.”

- Zhan-Xiang

The last chapter was dealing with very young learners, their characteristics and moreover, how to help them to get used to a new language. This chapter is concentrating on teaching vocabulary to pupils at this age.

2.1 Knowing a word

Learning new words is not a simple job and one can never say that he or she completed it. We discover new meanings of words on a daily basis even in our native tongue. Every language is consisted of words. It can be said that new words are made practically every day, therefore our vocabulary keeps widening. Do not underestimate the importance of learning vocabulary at any stage of the learning process, especially at the beginnings.

According to Thornbury (2012) knowing a word includes knowing its form and its meaning. The form of a word involves not only the written form, how it is spelled and what grammatical changes need to be done, but also how it sounds. Cameron (2001) shares his opinion and also adds that it is important to know its use.

Cameron (2001) presents a table of different aspects of word knowledge. Those types of knowledge used particularly for very young learners are:

- receptive knowledge – to understand a word when it is spoken
- memory knowledge – to recall a word when needed
- conceptual knowledge – to use a word with the correct meaning
- phonological knowledge – to hear the word and pronounce it properly

The last three of this knowledge are productive knowledge. The productive knowledge means that the word or a phrase is not only understood but it can also be used automatically by the learner in a correct way.

Knowing those aspects of word knowledge gives the teacher an idea about how much pupils know the particular word or phrase and what else is needed to teach them.

In the practical part of this thesis the list of aspects is used to check whether the pupils know the vocabulary or whether it needs to be practised a bit more. To say that the vocabulary is known, all four of the aspects need to be acquired.

2.2 Presenting new vocabulary

Before producing the language children need to receive it first. The teacher is the one who presents the language to them and who chooses what vocabulary is good to learn. He or she cannot just show the pupils a flashcard, say the name in English and make them to repeat it. Very young learners need a bit more interesting and enthusiastic approach.

The teacher should use as many things as he or she can to present new vocabulary. For example instead of flashcards we can use realia such as our clothes, furniture in the class or pupils' toys.

According to my experience, photographs of real objects seem to catch more interest than cartoon flashcards.

Another option to present vocabulary is through puppets. A lot of specialists such as Scott and Ytreberg (1990), Reilly and Ward (1997), Phillips (1994), and many others recommend using a puppet or a mascot. This character speaks and understands only English. It helps the teacher to create dialogues about practically

everything. Letting the puppet present new words might help the teacher to keep childrens' attention.

2.3 Learning words

Children learn new words through participating in the classroom activities. As was already mentioned, it is specific for very young learners that their grammar develops gradually. Since they are not able to analyse the language, opinions differ as to how much grammar can be taught therefore vocabulary teaching should be the main content of the class. The problematic of teaching grammar is discussed in the next chapter.

The teacher needs to keep in mind that pupils have limited knowledge of word in their first language. Very young children are still building their native language vocabulary. They start with naming objects around them in first language acquisition. Those words are only “names for things” which are acquired by the children seeing or touching the objects that words refer to. (Cameron, 2001)

According to the characteristics of very young learners, they learn English in almost the same way as they acquire their first language. Their understanding comes through their senses and experience.

As their need to express themselves grows, the vocabulary expands. Cameron (2001) does not see it as a problem though: *“Vocabulary development is a continuous process, not just of adding new words but of building up knowledge about words we already know partially.”* (Cameron, 2001: 74)

Children learn new words by meeting them in different situations. The more opportunities of those situations children get, the better they will remember the word. At the same time they expand their knowledge of the meaning of the word

and how it is used in the foreign language. It is up to the teacher to give children as many opportunities as they need and deserve.

The best way to teach vocabulary to very young learners is to illustrate the meaning of the word by a picture, real object or an action. In order to remember, the new word should be used by the pupils in relevant contexts. (Phillips, 1994)

2.4 Vocabulary and grammar

People sometimes share the opinion that children who have not yet attended compulsory school are too young and not ready to start learning a second language, They should enjoy their childhood playing. Those people cannot be more wrong. According to Sylvie Doláková (in Těthalová, 2013), children in this young age have a unique ability to understand the context of what is said even though they do not understand every single word. They do not focus on the words themselves, they perceive the context rather by non-verbal communication. In other words the new information is taken as a whole and not word by word, the same way as they learn their native language. It might be said that it is easier for very young children to learn a second language thanks to this ability to perceive meaning. Therefore children should start as early as possible. (Doláková, 2013)

The same opinion is shared by Susan Halliwell (1994: 3) as she adds:

“We know from experience that very young children are able to understand what is being said to them even before they understand the individual words. Intonation, gesture, facial expressions, actions and circumstances all help to tell them what the unknown words and phrases probably mean. By understanding the message in this way they start to understand the language.”

As it can be seen, young learners are able to understand a sentence even though they do not know all the words in it. Knowing this fact, the teacher should not spend too much time trying to explain sentence structures or particular words, he or she should rather focused on helping their pupils to understand the meaning of the whole sentence.

One way to do that is to use gestures, mimics or intonation. Perhaps using puppets, which imitate a dialogue, might be a good idea. The most important is that the children know what the phrase means, how to react and how to pronounce it.

It is not expected to teach grammar at this young age. Learners do not know the grammar of their native language therefore they will not be able to understand any grammatical rules used in the foreign language they are learning.

Scott and Ytreberg (1991: 6) share the same opinion: *“How good they are in the foreign language is not dependent on whether they have learnt the grammar rules or not.”* That is why only the minimum of grammar should be taught and only for the older learners, not for very young ones.

To emphasize the importance of vocabulary over grammar, there is a quote from the book *“How to teach vocabulary”* by Scott Thornbury. The book focuses on students of all ages, not only very young learners:

“If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words!”(Dellar H. And Hocking D. In Thornbury, 2012:13)

This thesis will not deal with any grammatical structures because it is simply too difficult for very young learners. It is focused on teaching vocabulary, or as the case may be, the chunks.

2.5 Chunks of language

As it has already been mentioned very young learners are not capable of understanding grammatical rules therefore it cannot be expected that they use long sentences and difficult expressions. Teachers should be aware of that and adjust the activities to this fact.

On the other hand it might be frustrating to see that after all the effort the teacher makes, children still know only a few individual words. One way to avoid this issue is to teach chunks of language.

“*Chunks of language*” means either an expression or a short sentence consists of known words, or a phrase which children learn as a whole. Some chunks are fixed, others can be complemented.

Firstly, the teacher can start by explaining the use of *can* for ability. At the very beginning children need to acquire certain verbs, for example *jump, sing, nod, clamp, ride, swim* etc. Later they add *I can* or *I can't*. Instead of saying only single verbs, they can actually say whole sentences such as *I can sing* or *I can't swim*.

Secondly, children learn some useful phrases often used in the class e.g.: *I don't know, You are welcome, See you later alligator, One more time* etc. Those are short sentences or phrases consistent of several words but children take it as a one word and use it that way.

Jane Moon (2000) also adds that teaching only chunks of language might be helpful at the early stages of learning. It helps learners to participate in

communication, moreover, learners are able to express themselves in simple sentences without knowing any grammatical structure.

In an article posted to TeachingEnglish.org on February 2010¹ is mentioned that teaching chunks of language is much more rewarding for the children as well as for the teacher. Learners are encouraged by knowing they can actually express themselves rather than just saying individual words. The use of real English is not only appreciated but it also encourages learners to learn more.

Besides the more words learners know, the more they are able to understand and to express themselves.

2.6 Teaching vocabulary through listening and speaking skills

Teaching vocabulary to very young learners might seem as a difficult task. The problem is obvious, very young learners are neither able to write down the vocabulary, nor read it. There is no other way for them than to remember it. Therefore, this thesis is focusing only on the two skills which are listening and speaking. Reading and writing are redundant for the learners at this age.

Even with the reduced sources for remembering the words the pupils will acquire the vocabulary properly if they have enough opportunities to practise and revise their knowledge. To do so, the teacher needs to prepare a great variety of listening and speaking activities. As a reward for all the effort is the fact that children love doing practically everything with enthusiasm and it is hardly unlikely that they will refuse to participate in the activity, especially if it is presented in a funny and interesting way. The pupils also appreciate to repeat activities over and over again as it raises their confidence with the particular activity.

1 "Teaching "chunks" to Very Young Learners," accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/shelliscfc/teaching-chunks-very-young-learners>

Slattery (2004) thinks that very young learners acquire new vocabulary rather fast. One of the reasons is that during their mutual interaction with objects or pictures which they see or which they play with, pupils name those objects in English. Another reason is a constant repeating and remembering of phrases, songs or stories. Finally, sometimes new vocabulary is learnt by chance. Pupils catch the phrases during games or activities.

By stating those points, it can be claimed that very young learners remember new words and phrases through activities that require their full attention. Examples of those activities are described in this part of the thesis. The activities suggested are based on the book *Teaching English to children* (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990) and *Young learners* (Phillips, 1994). Those activities are divided into listening and speaking activities.

Another reason, why this thesis is dealing with teaching vocabulary through listening and speaking skills, is, that the course book *Hippo and Friends* (Shelby, 2006), which was used during my teaching experience, is based on songs and stories. Hence in the listening part, there is a chapter specifically devoted to listening to stories and in the speaking part, there is a chapter about songs, chants and rhymes.

And the final reason for mentioning those activities is that they were all used to teach very young learners during their lessons in the language school FAN Turnov.

This chapter helps to understand how to develop vocabulary through listening and speaking skills, including suggestions of elementary activities which can be used on a daily basis. Additionally, the activities are easy to adapt to the particular needs.

2.6.1 Teaching vocabulary through listening

Listening is the very first skill which very young learners experience. It provides a main source of language during which the learners can pick up their own ideas about the language from and which will later be used in order to express themselves in English. Bearing in mind that by listening, children are actively learning the language.

Slattery and Willis (2001) claim that the more children listen, the better. By listening they are not only acquiring the language and they are learning to understand, but also they are absorbing pronunciation and intonation.

It is recommended by Phillips (1994) and Scott and Ytreberg (1991) to help the learners make the meaning clear by using pictures, mime and body language.

It is very usual that children spend some time listening and taking in language before they actually use it. This stage is called the silent period.

It is the time when learners absorb a language without producing it. Children might be shy from the very beginning and they perhaps need time to process everything around them. They formulate their own personal grammar which they adapt and use later. It is recommended to respect this period by not making the learners speak if they are not ready. (Phillips, 1994)

No matter how long this period might be, it will eventually end because children usually have a great need to express themselves. The teacher should wait until the learner feels confident and uses English spontaneously.

Correspondingly, Phillips (1994) claims that learners usually understand more language than they can use. They are able to respond to instructions, perhaps answer yes/no questions by nodding their heads before they start producing the language.

Under those circumstances it is recommended to use mainly activities which require non-verbal responses from children rather than activities where the language is immediately produced. Even though the learners do not make any language, thanks to the non-verbal contributions the sense of the content is clear. (Pinter, 2006)

This is a typical example of receptive knowledge. Pupils understand the language but they are not able to use it yet, they do not know all the aspects of a word knowledge, as they are mentioned above.

2.6.1.1 CD or teacher

Listening activity might be done by listening to the audio CD from the course book. They are useful in the way that the students are familiarized with the accents of native speakers.

What is very important to realize is that the teacher may be also a source of listening material. Giving instructions and organising the class in English is a way to make it more authentic for the children.

There are several advantages in listening to a teacher rather than listening to a CD. Teacher is able to interact with the learners and help them understand the story by using gestures, mimics and body language. Moreover, when the story is read, the teacher can go back and read some parts again and check if everyone understands. (Phillips, 1994)

2.6.1.2 Examples of listening activities

Listening might be quite difficult and boring task. As it is already known, very young learners are able to follow up a story but they also enjoy movement and looking at books. Thus they are not be able to sit and just listen to a song or a story,

they will become restless very easily. Therefore it is important to keep their attention. One way to do that is to somehow involve them in the listening process.

Scott and Ytreberg (1991) made a list of listening activities which require the children to not only listen but also participate:

- Moving around – this is one of the typical *listen and do activity*. The younger the children are, the more movement and physical activity they need. Learners need to follow the teacher's instructions, whatever he or she says, they have to do it. This way pupils are learning from each other whereas the teacher is checking classroom vocabulary.
- Put up your hands – there is a great variety of this type of exercise. Children put up their hands when, for example, they hear a certain word or a sound. The teacher might start saying colours and every time he or she says something else than a colour, pupils raise their hand.
- Mime stories – while the story is telling, the teacher and the pupils are performing it. It provides a chance for the teacher to participate with the learners.
- Drawing – the teacher tells the pupils what to draw or colour. It might be used for checking object vocabulary, colours, and numbers.

2.6.1.3 *Listening to stories*

During the pre-school years children are often able to follow a story, correct the narrator if he or she tells the story in a different way than it is supposed to be, they are capable of pretending they are reading the text and eventually they might ask and answer questions about it. They have a great imagination but they also enjoy looking at books with pictures. It is very natural for children at this stage to listen to stories. (Reilly and Ward, 1997)

As can be seen, listening to a story is one of the elementary and inherent ways for very young learners to learn a foreign language. Scott and Ytreberg (1991) recommend creating a friendly and secure atmosphere in order to achieve the maximum benefit out of listening to stories in English. They also add:

“Listening to stories allows children to form their own inner pictures. They have no problems with animals and objects with talk – they can identify with them, and the stories can help them to come to terms with their own feeling.” (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991: 28)

It should be kept in mind that there is a difference between telling a story and reading it from a book. If a story is told, the teacher can keep an eye contact with the learners, use all sorts of gestures and facial expressions, and most importantly the language can be adjusted to the level of the learners. On the other hand, if a story is read from the book, it should not be changed at all. Very young children enjoy repeating their favourite stories over and over again therefore after a couple of repetitions they will know the stories word by word and they might be very unsatisfied with the changes. (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991)

Pinter (2006) recommends listening to stories because thanks to the repetition, the language is picked up more easily. Repetitions also make linguistic input more noticeable. Equally important is that listening to stories is the most authentic and popular activity among young children.

2.6.1.4 Total physical response (TPR)

A popular approach to vocabulary learning is TPR, which is an abbreviation for Total Physical Response. It is classified as a listening activity for presenting new vocabulary or even chunks of language. It is up to the teacher to choose which topic is being presented. However, it is recommended to use words, whose meaning is

easily demonstrated by physical movement and this movement needs to be obvious to the learners without the necessity of translating it, for example: *open your book* or *sit down*.

This approach was developed by James J. Asher in America. He found out that before children start speaking, they do a lot of listening which is attended by physical responses. He claims that the best way for learners to analyse the language is when they respond with a physical movement. (Brown, 2000)

Basically, it is a physical reaction to a phrase or a sentence spoken in a foreign language. Thornbury (2012: 79) describes TPR:

“A TPR lesson typically involves the teacher demonstrating actions, using real objects, and then getting the learners to perform the same or similar actions in response to commands.”

Since children do not know the abstract words and they use their senses to remember vocabulary, Reilly and Ward (1997) find TPR very useful at this age.

Some advantages of TPR are, firstly, the target language does not have to be translated. The meaning is explained in the situation which is happening. Secondly, it contains movement and physical activity, which is popular among young children.

There are also things that have to be remembered. For a class full of very young learners the teacher needs to use short and clear instructions, definitely not complex sentences, and perhaps not even longer sentences.

2.6.2 Teaching vocabulary through speaking

Very young learners are already able to express themselves. They have a great reserve of vocabulary in their native language, they are capable of talking about themselves, their surroundings and their friends. Teacher's task is to teach them how to express all their thoughts in English.

“Part of the magic of teaching young children a foreign language is their unspoken assumption that the foreign language is just another way of expressing what they want to express, but there are limitations because of their lack of actual language.” (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991: 33)

There is some more information which should be kept in mind. Understanding those basic points helps the teacher to realize what needs to be considered when teaching speaking.

As it is mentioned in characteristics of very young learners, big advantage is that they are not afraid to talk and make mistakes, they are not ashamed of using another language in front of their classmates, on the contrary, they enjoy it and they like to show how much they have already learnt.

Unfortunately, the pupils have very little opportunities to use the language somewhere else than the classroom, therefore, it is essential to give them as many opportunities to talk as possible. Even though they are less afraid to talk, children need to feel supported when they start to speak English. Their teacher should encourage all the efforts they made, no matter how small the efforts might be. Slattery and Willis (2001) think that although there will be mistakes and errors, it is up to the teacher to decide which mistakes need to be corrected and which can be kept unnoticeable.

Pinter (2006) shares the opinion that pupils should spend a lot of time on the repetitive exercises which are based on drilling and practising fixed phrases and repeating models. At the beginning stages of teaching speaking it is beneficial to concentrate on simple but meaningful pattern drilling.

It is important to realize that very young learners, thanks to the lack of reading skills, hear a flow of sound which they connect before they divide it into

single words. Thereupon they understand only the general meaning of sentences and phrases; they do not recognize individual words. As a result they hear intonation patterns, and words or sounds that are stressed. These are the sounds they will say first. (Slattery and Willis, 2001)

2.6.2.1 *What to expect*

Learn how to speak in a foreign language is a very difficult and complicated task. When pupils want to make proper sentences, they need to know not only vocabulary pronunciation but also the sentence structures, functions and much more.

In order to help the learners to use English as much as possible without teaching them grammar and sentence structure we might want to consider using short fixed expressions, also known as chunks of language, and set classroom language such as greetings and requests.

This way the children get used to the sound, feel, and rhythm of the language and they do not have to worry about formulating their thoughts. The older the children are, the more language variations they use. (Phillips, 1994)

One may say that children only seem to repeat phrases and short sentences without actually acquiring the language. Slattery and Willis (2001) have objections to this statement, the learners are getting used to speaking English and they are practising the intonation patterns. Additionally, they are becoming confident about talking in English.

According to Phillips (1994) it is crucial that children know the meaning of the activity which can be for example: describe a picture, sing a song or say a poem.

2.6.3 Simple speaking activities

The biggest problem any teacher might face is that the pupils lapse into their own language. The reason they tend to do that is that they do not know enough English to finish the task. Very young learners have a very limited vocabulary. The solution seems rather simple, the teacher needs to choose a task which is within the pupils' capabilities and he or she should make it clear that only English can be used in this particular task.

Phillips (1994) recommends promising the pupils a few minutes of 'relaxation' in their own language after they complete the task. Under those circumstances, they might try harder to do the task in English.

Phillips (1994) presents a list of simple speaking activities which are suitable even for pupils who know only a few words and during which their speaking skills are developed.

- Find your partner – the teacher gives students names of well-known people or TV characters. Each name must be used twice and the children are not supposed to hear each other's names. The children then need to find their partners by asking: "*Hello, what is your name?*"
- Which one is it – children work in a group. The teacher gives flashcards or pictures of, for example, transport or other objects to one of the child in the group. He or she then describes the picture and the others have to guess what it is. This activity is a good way to practise colours and a phrase *It is...* If the flashcards have not been used before, it is a good idea to describe them before handing them out.
- Mime and guess – the teacher gives children cards of actions such as jump, nod your head or clap your hands. One of the children then mimes the action

and the rest of the class needs to guess what it is. This activity does not have to be used only for action verbs; children also like to mime animals or other things.

2.6.3.1 Songs, chants and rhymes

Songs and chants give children more listening practice but what is more important, it helps them remember structures and vocabulary. Once the children have learnt a new song or rhyme, they tend to sing along with the teacher or even demonstrate it in front of the class. Hence those activities are presented as speaking not listening activities.

Children have a propensity to learn easily a chant or a song rather than a spoken text. This might be perhaps because they respond strongly to music and rhythm. Thanks to those activities, it is easier for them to achieve native-like pronunciation. (Phillips, 1994)

Besides, children love singing songs and saying short poems as they are taught in primary schools. They should be encouraged to perform songs, chants and rhymes for their parents or friends.

In an experimental study in 1999, demonstrated by H. Kolsawalla (in Pinter, 2006), it was shown that children more often remember the rhythmic components rather than narrated ones.

In order to keep the rhythm of the song or chant, children can clap their hands or even use some instruments such as a bell or a tambourine. To keep them interested, they can even create a simple choreography, not too difficult though, otherwise they will focus only on the moves not the language.

When combined with pictures or objects, songs and chants help connect the words in English with the visual element. Children sometimes learn movement and mimics before they actually say the lyrics of a song or rhyme.

Singing songs and saying chants and rhymes are used not only in a learning process or as a practising vocabulary, but also to connect with new topics and, most importantly, for fun. To make those activities as much enjoyable and purposeful for children, the teacher needs to keep in mind that songs or rhymes should correspond with pupils' age and their level of English. (Slattery and Willis, 2001)

2.6.4 Stirres and settlers

As it has been known, the activities for very young learners need to be changed frequently. In order to keep some sort of discipline in the class and keep the children interested at the same time, it is a good idea to rotate activities which settle them or, the other way around, stimulate them.

Activities, which are considered stirrers, are those which wake the pupils up, stimulate them and cut them lose. If there are too many of them, the pupils may lose they focus and become less constructive and restless. (Halliwell, 1994)

What usually stirs the classes are activities involving movement, songs and chants and of course some games. (Clarke, 2008²)

In contrast to stirrers, there are activities which calm the pupils down. In a negative sense, some of those activities might bore them after a few moments. (Halliwell, 1994)

A typical settlers are arts and crafts activities, usually any kind of listening which does not involve movement, and sometimes activities from the workbooks. (Clarke, 2008³)

2 Clarke, Sue, „Settlers and stillers for the primary classroom“, accessed August 18, 2015. <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/stirrers-settlers-primary-classroom>

Those kinds of activities should be in balance. We do not want to lose the childrens' attention because they might be bored or over-excited. Halliwell (1994) recommends to make a chart that reflects which activities belong to what group.

It is important to realize that even though a game seems like a typical stirrer activity, it can be used to settle the class down as well. For example, the game pelmanism, during which children need to find the same pictures. To success, they need to focus on remembering where the pictures are. This requires a lot of concentration and practically no movement. This activity calms the pupils down hence it should be followed by some activity which rather stimulates them.

2.7 Games

Games are very natural way for children to learn something new. Learning a new language is not an exception. As Harnšpachová and Řandová (2010) claim, playing games is an essential part of the learning process. By playing games, they learn new vocabulary and basic grammar in a natural, enjoyable way. As it is said in the characteristics, very young learners acquire the language rather indirectly than directly and games are a great tool for indirect learning.

Slattery and Willis, (2001) share the opinion that children learn through playing and they add that it is childrens' spontaneous approach to games that ensure their interest and focus and that is the way new knowledge and skills are acquired.

2.7.1 Characteristic of games

Khan (in Brumfit, Moon, Tongue, 1996) describes games as activities which are managed by rules and which have defined goals. To finish a game, those goals need to be achieved. An important part of the game is a contest either between players or between the players and the goal. The rules need to be strictly set and

3 Clarke, Sue, „Settlers and stillers for the primary classroom“, accessed August 18, 2015. <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/stirrers-settlers-primary-classroom>

kept by everyone and in the same way. Children have a great sense of fair play and they are usually very concerned with preventing others from breaking the rules. Games should lead to having fun. The element of play is an essential part of the game.

Games for very young learners usually involve routines and repetitive phrases which are very similar to language drills. The language form is given and controlled. Pupils have a lot of opportunities to learn the target language by practising and repeating it in order to play the game.

Not every game is suitable for very young learners. It needs to be considered which games to play and how pupils will benefit from the games.

Khan (in Brumfit, Moon, Tongue, 1996) created a list which suggests ways of selecting games to suit particular contexts and learners. Those characteristics should help the teacher to decide whether the game is useful and what does it require.

- Pedagogical focus – the game needs to focus on something specific, for example a topic vocabulary or a particular sentence structure.
- Patterns of organisation – the game can be played in pairs, in groups or teams or all the pupils play against the teacher. It is also good to realize how much space is needed.
- Materials and equipment – the game might not require anything and it can be played without any special objects. On the other hand there can be a list of material needed such as computers, papers, pens and scissors, pictures or cards and so on. Materials and equipment for the game need to be prepared before it starts.

- ‘Ludic’ principles – chance and skill⁴, competition and cooperation⁵ and uncertainty⁶ identify characteristic differences between games.

Every teacher should take those points into consideration before he or she decides to make the game a part of the lesson. Children love games and want to play them for fun. Not every game is a suitable activity for a language class though. This list will be used in the practical part of this thesis.

2.7.2 Advantages of using games

Children see games as fun activities and they do not have to be asked twice to participate. They play games because they like them and enjoy them which makes games a great motivational tool.

Using games in teaching has a lot of advantages. For instance Halliwell (1994) claims that games are not only fun, but also create the desire to communicate. Children are so consumed by the game they do not even notice they are learning something; they are not focusing on the language. This process is called indirect learning. Very young children have not developed the capacity for conscious, or as it is called, direct learning yet, they prefer indirect learning, as was already mentioned in the characteristics.

As can be seen, playing a game does not mean only some extra fun activity which is used as a reward at the end of the class. Children are focusing on the task and at the same time they are subconsciously processing the language. This way, through their sense of fun and game they are acquiring new experience. That is why Halliwell (1994) thinks games should take a central part in teaching very young learners.

4 Chance or skill – games either or on the element of luck or depends on pupils skills.

5 Competition and cooperation – pupils might compete with each other or the other way around, they cooperate with each other.

6 Uncertainty – is a principle based on pupils memory and how much they can remember.

Another advantage is given by Slattery and Willis (2001), playing games gives children the opportunity to use the foreign language in an enjoyable way. It might help them to practise vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

Finally, playing games develop childrens' ability to cooperate, to compete without being aggressive and sometimes to handle not being the winner. (Phillips, 1994)

It cannot be stressed enough how important and crucial games are for very young learners. As it was already mentioned, it is the childrens' natural interest in play and fun that makes games inseparable part of the learning process. It is highly recommended by many specialists in this field to integrate games into everyday lessons. As Reilly and Ward (1997: 9) say: *“Much of the learning will take place through play. It is widely recognized nowadays that play is an important part of the learning process.”*

Khan (in Brumfit, Moon, Tongue, 1996: 142) adds: *“Children play and children want to play. Children learn through playing. In playing together, children interact and in interacting they develop language skills.”*

As can be seen in this part of the thesis, many of the specialists in this field agree on the importance of games during learning process. Thanks to my experience in teaching very young learners I can see their point. Even though we used colourful books, funny videos, happy songs and other useful instruments, the children were always the most excited when we were playing a game.

In the practical part there are introduced games which were played with the pupils during their lessons. The games were related to the main topic units in the course book. Hence the practical part contains suggestion of five games for very young learners.

Practical part

3 Introduction

The main aim of the practical part is to suggest five games for very young learners describe them and later on test those games during the lessons in the Language school FAN Turnov.

The games were used for practising vocabulary which has already been learnt during the lessons. This material might be used by the teachers who are focusing on learners at this specific age.

There are one or two games at the end of each part of the unit in the books we used, Hippo and Friends (Selby, 2006). Some of the game structures are repeated in order to establish a routine and to make the games familiar. They are focusing on the target language and they are very easy to understand so the teacher does not have to spend too much time explaining the rules.

On the other hand the children did not find some of those games challenging enough. They last for a very short amount of time and when the initial excitement wore off, the children perceive the game as an exercise, not as the game it was supposed to be.

Knowing the characteristics of games, chapter 2.7.1, according to Khan (in Brumfit, Moon, Tongue, 1996), the games need to be managed by rules and defined by goals. The games in the course book were not successful because there was no contest between players or between the player and the goal. The lack of the competition led to the lack fun. Hence pupils did not want to play the games again and the games did not last.

For those reasons the practical part is dealing with games which comply with the characteristics of games in chapter 2.7.1. After a long consideration, five games were chosen to practise the target vocabulary.

The chosen games are well-known in the Czech community. The children knew the games in their first language but they were playing them in English. Nevertheless the game was still the same, the English language element made it more interesting, enjoyable, even educational and most importantly, suitable for our English lessons. Moreover, there was practically no time spent on explaining the rules because pupils knew them.

4 Teaching in FAN

4.1 Course specification

The games were presented during my lessons in the Language School FAN in Turnov. There was a general English course for very young learners with the frequency of one 60 minute lesson a week.

The classroom had a lot of space for activities which involved movement therefore there was no need to change places when games were played.

4.2 Learners' group specification

All the games were played with the same group of very young learners. They have not had any experience with English before. All of them were attending a preschool facility. All of them learnt English as a foreign language. The age of the students ranged between 5-6 years.

The course was accompanied by 6 children and one teacher.

4.3 Hippo and Friends Starter

The special set of books, a special course, Hippo and Friends Starter (Selby, 2006) was used during the lessons with very young learners. The book has six main topic units, a Starter unit and three special units. The main units are based on songs and stories. The importance of songs and stories are mentioned in the chapters 2.6.1.3 and 2.6.3.1 in the theoretical part of this thesis.

The games, which are described later in this practical part, correspond with the educational content in Hippo and Friends Starter (Selby, 2006). They are based on the knowledge pupils acquired after each main unit. The target language from

unit 4 and 5 was put together and practised through one game therefore there are only five games suggested.

4.4 Classroom language

As it was already mentioned in the theoretical part, a good way to help children get used to the foreign language is to use the classroom language to adopt the instruction vocabulary with which they will be familiar. The teacher should keep using the exact same phrases; therefore, children will remember them better.

For this reason I would like to present the list of some phrases used while teaching very young learners:

- Greetings:

Hello. / Good morning.

- Instructions:

Sit/Stand in a circle, please.

Go to your table, please.

Listen. Look. Are you ready?

Give me the...

Let's sing a song!

Don't do that./ Please, stop.

Open your book.

Look at the picture.

Use the colour pencils.

Do the actions.

Let's do it again! / One more time!

- Praising:

Very good!

Well done.

Excellent!

Great!

That's beautiful / lovely / nice.

- Other phrases which were frequently used by the learners:

Please.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

I don't know.

Let's do it again!

I like it.

5 Focused observation

The first aim of the observation is to find out if the game can be played in English according to the description suggested by the author of this thesis. Retrospectively, there are suggested further improvements for the game, if needed.

The next aim is to find out what words, if any, pupils do not know and practise those words again. For further practice, there are some examples of speaking and listening activities in the theoretical part.

In order to say that a pupil know a word, he or she has to know every aspect of a word knowledge: receptive, memory, conceptual and phonological. A table of those aspects is presented in the chapter 2.1 in the practical part.

Moreover, after each game the pupils wrote an achievement test.

6 Achievement tests

Achievement tests were taken in order to make sure that every pupil knows the meaning of the target vocabulary.

Considering very young learners' abilities, writing and reading skills were not acquired during the test. The teacher handed out the papers with a set of pictures. Pupils' task was to circle the words that the teacher selected and said out loud.

The results of the tests are stated at the ends of game descriptions.

7 Suggested games

Those games were played at the first part of the lessons, usually after recycling vocabulary from the previous lesson. This activity settled pupils and they did not enjoy it very much. Therefore as a reward for a good job, a game was promised each recycling activity. It not only worked as a great motivation tool, but it also stimulated pupils after a calm activity. As it was suggested in the chapter 2.6.4, stirrers and settlers should take turns.

Four of those games are considered stirrers, pelmanism is a settling activity therefore it was the only game played at the second half of the lesson.

I chose to describe those five games because they were played at the end of each lesson as a checking that pupils remember the vocabulary. All of those games were familiar to children, they enjoyed playing them and they asked to repeat them as much as possible.

Simon says	
Presumed input knowledge and the target language	Pupils should know those action verbs and instructions: clap, jump, nod your head, run, sing, touch your feet, say hello, say goodbye
Pedagogical focus	Following instructions, action verbs
Organisation	Whole class, one leader
Materials	None
Ludic principles	Skill, competition
Aims	To practise instructions and action verbs through listening.
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The leader gives instructions to the players. 2. The players must obey only if the instruction starts by saying “Simon says...” otherwise nothing happens. 3. For example: The leader says: “Simon says jump.” (players should jump) 4. For example: The leader says: “Touch your head.” (players do nothing) 5. The player who makes mistake by following the instruction without “Simon says” can not continue in the game. 6. The winner is the player who remains the last.
Variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of “Simon says” the leader can use any other name of the players, for example, “Charlie says”

	therefore only Charlie follows the instruction, no one else.
Czech equivalent	Kuba říká, Simon říká

- Problematic vocabulary before the game:

Nod your head

Clap your hands

In both cases most of the pupils did not recall the words when needed.

As a leader, the teacher paid particular attention to those words and she repeated them more than the others. When she was sure that the pupils were able to recall the words, they switched places. The pupils who got all four parts of word knowledge even before the game started became the leaders at first. The pupils who seemed to have very little word knowledge were leaders at the second half of the game. During the game, all children became the leader for a few minutes.

The teacher asked everyone to use *nod your head* and *clap your hands* at least once whenever they were leaders to make sure, they acquired memory and phonological knowledge.

- Observation of the game:

The game passed as was planned in the description. The variation of the game was played as well and it passed as was planned in the description.

In order to find out whether every pupil can produce the target language, the teacher made sure, that all the children got a chance to be the leader.

- Problem:

The pupils who made a mistake, according to the rules, had to sit down to the table and stop playing the game. After a moment they become restless, they lost their interest and they were disturbing the pupils who were still playing.

- Solution:

The second time this game was played, the teacher gave a red card to the players who made a mistake, instead of making them stop participate. They did not have a chance to win but they were still part of the game therefore the problem with disturbance was solved. The winner was the last one without a red card.

- Summary of the game:

By the end of the game pupils were able to react to every instruction given. They were able to produced the target language.

It can be said that they know all four aspects of word knowledge for every phrase.

There was no vocabulary that needed to be practised again as pupils understood everything.

- The achievement test:

The achievement test took place after the game. None of the pupils made a single mistake.

Molecules	
Presumed input knowledge and the target language	Pupils should know how to count to five
Pedagogical focus	Counting
Organisation	Whole class, one leader
Materials	CD with songs, CD player, stuffed animals or other toys.
Ludic principles	Skill, cooperation
Aims	To practise counting from one to five
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the teacher plays the CD, pupils move around the classroom. • When she stops, she has to say a number. For example, three. • Pupils make groups of three. They can use a toy or a stuffed animal to finish their molecule • Pupils then count all the parts of the molecule and say the final number. • The winner is the one who makes a molecule with the right number of players.
Variation	Other items do not have to be used, if there are enough pupils.
Czech equivalent	Molekuly

- Problematic vocabulary before the game:

Three

Two of the pupils were having a hard time to pronounce the word.

It can be said that they did not require phonological knowledge even though they managed the rest. The teacher therefore repeated number *three* the most often in order to help them remember its pronunciation.

- Observation of the game:

The game passed as was planned in the description. The variation of the game could not be played because the group consisted of only 6 pupils.

The teacher chose songs used during the lessons. Since the pupils knew all the songs, they were singing with the CD and dancing.

In order to find out whether every pupil can produce the target language, the teacher made sure, that all the children were counting out loud.

- Problem:

No problem appeared with this game.

- Summary of the game:

By the end of the game pupils were able to count from one to five.

It can be said that they know all four aspects of word knowledge for every word.

There was no vocabulary that needed to be practised again as pupils understood everything.

- The achievement test:

The achievement test took place after the game. None of the pupils made a single mistake.

Mr. Stork lost his cap	
Presumed input knowledge and the target language	Pupils know basic colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink. They know the meaning of the sentence “Mr. Stork lost his cap.” and “The colour was...”
Pedagogical focus	Colours
Organisation	Whole class, one leader
Materials	Colourful objects or pictures in the class
Ludic principles	Skills, competition
Aims	To practise colours.
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The leader says: “Mr. Stork lost his cap. The colour was...” For example, blue. 2. The children have to go around the class looking for something blue. 3. When a pupil finds the colour, he or she has to touch it and say the colour. This way the player is safe. 4. The leader starts to chase players who are not safe. 5. Whoever is caught, lost.
Variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colourful paper can be used
Czech equivalent	Pan Čáp ztratil čepičku

- Problematic vocabulary before the game:

Purple

Yellow

Some of the pupils did not recall the words when needed and one of them pronounced *purple* poorly.

As a leader, the teacher paid particular attention to those words and she repeated them more than the others. When she was sure that the pupils were able to recall the words, they switched places with those pupils, who recalled the words at the beginning of the game. During the game, all children became the leader for a few minutes. The pupil who did not recall the words and who had bad pronunciation became the leader as the last.

The teacher asked all of them to use *yellow* and *purple* whenever they were leaders to make sure, they acquired memory and phonological knowledge.

- Observation of the game:

The games passed as was planned in the description. The variation of the game could not be played because there was not enough space in the classroom.

When pupils found the colour, they touched it and said the colour out loud. This way the teacher made sure they can produce the target language.

- Problem:

The teacher was the leader at first. The teacher said: “Mr. Stork lost his cap and the colour was blue.” Two of the pupils ran to a picture of a blue boat, one touched her blue jeans. The rest, instead of trying to find something blue, touched the girl's blue jeans.

- Solution:

A new rule was added. One child can touch one thing, every body has to find their own thing.

- Summary of the game:

By the end of the game pupils were able to receive and produced all colours.

It can be said that they know all four aspects of word knowledge for every colour.

There was no vocabulary that needed to be practised again as pupils understood everything.

- The achievement test:

The achievement test took place after the game. None of the pupils made a single mistake.

Pelmanism	
Presumed input knowledge and the target language	Pupils should know these words: plane, train, car, bus, bicycle, ball, doll, and teddy.
Pedagogical focus	Items of transport and toys
Organisation	Whole class
Materials	A set of cards. The backs of the cards need to be indistinguishable and the faces match up in pairs.
Ludic principles	Skill, competition, uncertainty
Aims	To practise items of transport and toys
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The cards are spread on the table facing down. The cards do not overlap. 2. Players take turns choosing two cards, turning them so the pictures are seen by everyone else. 3. The player names the cards. 4. If the player finds two identical cards, he or she keeps them and the game continues with the next player. 5. If the cards are not the same, the player put them back facing down and the game continues with the next player. 6. The game ends when all the cards have been taken. 7. The winner is the one with the most cards.
Variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This game can be used with any other vocabulary.

Czech equivalent	Pexeso
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- Problematic vocabulary:

Train

Teddy

All of the pupils were able to understand and recall the words. One of them had trouble pronouncing the word *train* and another one thought that it is possible to call a stuffed toy *bear* because it looks like a bear. He also said he learnt the word *bear* in television while he was watching an English show for children about animals.

To explain the difference between teddy and bear, the teacher used a picture of a bear and a realia of a teddy. During playing the game, the teacher found out what card has a picture of a teddy and remembered it. Afterwards she suggested the pupil to turn that card in order to make sure the pupil understood the difference. He named the picture correctly and it seemed that the pupil did not confuse those words any more.

- Observation of the game:

The game passed as was planned in the description. The variation of the game was played at the end of the school year more words. The variation also passed as was planned in the description.

When pupils turned the card, they named it. This way the teacher made sure they can produce the target language.

- Problem:

No problem appeared with this game.

- Summary of the game:

By the end of the game pupils know all four aspects of word knowledge for every word.

It can be said that they know all four aspects of word knowledge for the target language.

There was no vocabulary that needed to be practised again as pupils understood everything.

- The achievement test:

The achievement test took place after the game. None of the pupils made a single mistake.

Johnny, wake up	
Presumed input knowledge and the target language	<p>Pupils can count from one to five.</p> <p>They should know these words: cat, cow, dog, duck, elephant, goat, hippo, horse, monkey, mouse, pig, rooster, sheep.</p> <p>Pupils know what sound each animal makes in English.</p> <p>They understand the meaning of the question “What time is it?” and the verb “wake up”</p>
Pedagogical focus	Counting, animals, drilling the question “What time is it?”
Organisation	Whole class, one leader
Materials	A large area of free space
Ludic principles	Skill, competition
Aims	To practise counting, animal vocabulary and items of transport.
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Players make a line on one part of the classroom. The leader stands on the other side, facing the other players. 2. The leader and pupils start every round with a conversation about the time. 3. The leader starts by saying: “Johnny, wake up.” 4. All player chant together: “What time is it?” 5. The leader makes up the time, for example, five dog steps.

	<p>6. Players must make five steps like a dog.</p> <p>7. The winner is the player who gets to the leader first.</p>
Variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Czech equivalent	Honzo, vstávej

- Problematic vocabulary before the game:

Goat

Rooster

Duck

Most of the pupils did not recall those words when needed.

As a leader, the teacher paid particular attention to those words and she repeated them more than the others. When she was sure that the pupils were able to recall the words, they switched places. The pupils who got all four parts of word knowledge even before the game started tried to be the leaders at first. The pupils who seemed to have very little word knowledge were leaders at the second half of the game.

During the game, all children became the leader for a few minutes.

The teacher asked all of them to use *goat*, *rooster* and *duck* whenever they were leaders to make sure, they acquired memory and phonological knowledge.

One of the pupils did not remember *goat* at all, he did not have any knowledge of the word at the beginning of the game. He became the leader as the last one. By the time he got a chance to say the word *goat*, he already understand it, he memorize it and he also obtained conceptual knowledge of the word. When he pronounced it properly, the teacher was sure, that all four parts of word knowledge were successfully acquired.

- Observation of the game:

The game passed as was planned in the description. There were no variations of this game.

In order to find out whether every pupil can produce the target language, the teacher made sure, that all the children got a chance to be the leader.

- Problems:

At the beginning, the dilemma children were dealing with was whether they are supposed to count or make the animal sound while moving forward.

- Solutions:

It was decided that they will say both. For example, when they were asked to make 5 dog steps, they knelt and they were counting: “One woof, two woof, three woof, four woof, five woof.”

- Summary of the game:

By the end of the game pupils were able to demonstrate every animal and its sound therefore they understood those words. Most of them were able to produce every word. Two of the pupils were having a hard time to produce the words rooster and goat.

It can be said that they know all four aspects of a word knowledge, except for the words: rooster, and goat, in those cases, two of the pupils acquired only the receptive knowledge.

- The achievement test:

Before the achievement test, the teacher used some of the activities from chapter 2.6 to help her pupils to learn all aspects of word knowledge.

The achievement test took place at the end of the lesson. One of the pupil had a mistake, other pupils were correct.

Conclusion

This bachelor thesis is dealing with teaching vocabulary to very young learners. It describes very young learners and their specifications and different ways of acquiring new vocabulary, including games. This knowledge was used to suggest games for a group of pupils to find out whether they understand and are able to use target vocabulary.

Firstly, the term very young learners was defined so the teacher knows what to expect. Generally, we talk about children between ages of three to seven. More important than age specification is the level of their development though.

This group of pupils is very specific in the way that they have not started any compulsory school yet but they might be attending a preschool facility. They are not used to sit behind their tables and listen to the teacher, they are not able to take notes or find any information in books and also they cannot focus longer than a few minutes. On the other hand, they are excited to learn new things, they love playing games, singing songs and telling stories.

Knowing the characteristics of very young learners helped me as a teacher to understand my pupils and subsequently, prepare activities which they enjoyed.

Secondly, a chapter about what it means to know vocabulary and how it might be developed is presented in the next part of the theoretical part. Since very young learners are not able to read and write, their only chance to learn vocabulary is through listening and speaking skills. Therefore several activities based on listening and speaking skills are described. Those activities were successfully used during my own teaching experience. During the classes, the course book *Hippo and Friends Starter* (Shelby, 2006), which is also based on stories and songs, was used. After the Starter unit I found out that my pupils prefer games above all the activities

mentioned. The games provided in the course book turned out to be unsatisfactory as they do not include enough contest between the players. Keeping in mind the characteristic of games mentioned in the theoretical part, I suggested five games which might be used by every teacher to practise vocabulary.

Before realizing the games, I suggested a description, several steps to follow in order to play the game. During playing the game, I was observing my pupils trying to discover if some improvements are needed. The main aim of my observation was to make sure it is possible to use those games to practise the target vocabulary and acquire all four aspects of word knowledge. When pupils needed even more practise, activities focused on teaching vocabulary through listening and speaking skills took place. By the end of the game, everyone was able to understand the word, to pronounce it properly, they recalled it when they needed and they knew the correct meaning.

Pupils were also tested as a group during playing games and afterwards as individuals by taking an achievement test. The fact that pupils managed to pass all the achievement tests with only one mistake in one of them and they were all able to produce the words during the games indicates that practising those words was effective. Moreover, children were having a lot of fun and, as their parents told me, they wanted to play those games in English with their friends outside the classroom.

I hope that my bachelor thesis will help to inspire future teachers to teach very young learners and also helps them realize that playing games with such young pupils is an inseparable part of their learning process.

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