Socratic Questioning in the EFL curriculum for Young Learners and Very Young Learners:
Training and Online Community Building for In-service Teachers in Moldova
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In October 2012, the proposal for a professional teacher-training course on Socratic Questioning in the EFL Curriculum for Young learners and Very Young Learners will be presented to Ion Creanga State Pedagogical University in Moldova. The English Teacher Resource Center (ETRC) of Chisinau will be the designated host Institution. The program will consist on training 75 pre-service teachers and 75 in-service teachers via three workshops conducted at the ETRC. The result of this activity is the lesson plans adapted according to the CT approach, posted online on a monthly basis.

The workshops will benefit 150 EFL pre-service and in-service teachers and also indirectly benefit many kindergarteners from 141 public kindergartens as well as approximately 10 private kindergartens, including their parents who will have access to the academic teaching materials online. The materials will be posted online and updated once a month.

The purpose of the project is to develop Pre-K and K English communicative skills by implementing EFL Curriculum based on fostering critical thinking, during the September 2012 – May 2013 academic year. There is no accredited program for English teaching at this age in the Republic of Moldova. The country needs a program that will foster parent involvement in helping their children learn English.

**Hosts:** English Teacher Resource Center, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

**Participants:** 75 EFL in-service and 75 EFL pre-service teachers

**Program:** Three face-to-face 80-minute workshops, Peer Observation, Online posting of the results

**Schedule:** October 2012 Wednesdays from 15.30 PM to 16.50 PM

**Goals:** The goals of the professional development course are to:

- Develop the young and very young learners’ communicative skills;
- Create an EFL draft curriculum for young and very young learners;
- Facilitate communication between school and home;
- Develop resources for parents to see online; and
- Assist parents in using the resources posted online.
**Problem Identification**

Nowadays, the trend in Moldova is centered on the need for children to learn English since early childhood: the earlier you start, the more you know. In such a way, the kindergartens from Moldova, coming from either public or private tend to hire young specialists to teach English. Due to the fact that there is no textbook for teaching English to young learners approved by the Ministry of Education, it is high time that we implement an appropriate methodology for this age. As we are a post-Soviet country, the teaching methods are usually teacher-centered. This methodology is not helping the children to communicate.

Because novice teachers are still in training and find it difficult to communicate with parents, a guidebook full of practical suggestions will be produced. Parents and teachers struggle in communicating with each other just as much as they struggle communicating with their own children. That being said, the project proposal aims to develop an EFL curriculum for young and very young learners to help children communicate in English and parents become aware of the methodology being used with their children. Essentially, the project proposal attempts to get parents to recognize their roles as catalysts and identify how they can assist the classroom by maintaining fluid communication with the teacher. Moreover, a sense of community will be built prior, during, and after the duration of the workshops. A pivotal role in using Socratic Questioning in EFL in teaching is the fact that it engages the learner in active critical thinking through stimulating questioning, which will lead to further questions.

**Contextual Analysis**

The English Teaching Resource Center (ETRC) from Chisinau is a center where teachers of English regularly meet to attend teaching seminars. Once an ELT professional wants to organize a presentation, deliver a workshop, present a seminar, the teacher make a general announcement and teachers proceed to sign up for it. The workshop is announced via e-mail listing and the invitations are normally sent electronically; the average number of attendees to the workshops is twenty-five. The location for the delivery of the three workshops proposed for this project proposal will be the ETRC. As a result of these workshops, the teachers will create monthly redesigned lesson plans to be used in their EFL Kindergarten classes, and will post them to a website: www.gradinitamea.md, -- used as a networking tools for parents and kindergarteners from Chisinau, and as an educational portal where parents get updates and have access to multiple EFL resources. In my final contextual analysis regarding Kindergartens in Chisinau Kindergartens have not been accredited by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova up to this day.

**Learner Analysis**

The direct beneficiaries of the training are about 150 EFL pre-service and in-service teachers of young learners as well as the young learners coming from the kindergartens in Chisinau, i.e., 141 public and about 10 private kindergartens across the country. The indirect beneficiaries of the project are the parents that will have access to the academic teaching materials online that will be sequentially structured and will aim to follow the Socratic Questioning model. The repository of materials will be updated on a monthly basis.

**Content Analysis**

The project aims to gather the teachers and stakeholders interested in teaching English to young and very young learners to meet in three workshops and get acquainted to learn how to improve their two-way communication by fostering parental involvement and critical thinking. The proposed workshops will attempt to train teachers in restructuring the curriculum with the objective of teaching English to young learners (TEYLs) and teaching English to very young learners to think critically.

The follow-up program will require EFL pre-service and in-service teachers to modify the material they teach to go in accordance with CT strategies. The materials will be posted online once every month by using this website: www.gradinitamea.md, (www.mykindergarten.md), which is a permanently monitored
network and repository of EFL resources used by both parents and kindergarteners from Chisinau in multiple ways as a communication gateway to monitor all school activities.

The selective users can monitor homework, be informed of class objectives with anticipation, and read the carefully chosen class expectations. In addition, parents can easily track their children’s progress as well as be notified as to when they can meet with the teacher. One last thing to include in my content analysis deals with adding the systematic approach of communicating via multiple channels online. This proposal will evidently support the young specialists in supplementing the class with EFL activities to be used with the kindergarteners.

The main content for this program is to teach the art of Socratic Questioning in order to instill critical thinking to enhance excellence of thought. What the word ‘Socratic’ adds is systematicity, depth, and a keen interest in assessing the truth or plausibility of things. There is a special relationship between critical thinking and Socratic Questioning because both share a common end: interaction. Critical thinking consists of a comprehensive view of how the mind functions (in its pursuit of meaning and truth), and Socratic Questioning takes advantage of that overview to frame questions essential to the quality of that pursuit. The content for this program will be adapted from the online Critical Thinking course developed by University of Oregon for the E-Teacher Scholarship Program offered by the U.S. Department of State.

**Delivery Analysis**
Each of the three workshops to be presented at the ETRC –see (www.etrc.md) will last 80 minutes. Approximately 25 participants will attend every workshop. As a result of the workshops, the EFL teachers are to produce lesson plans to teach English to young and very learners. These lesson plans will be displayed online once a month. The materials will be based upon the Art of Socratic Questioning. Additional sources are the Critical Thinking sources, namely the information on Socratic thinking. The website has also a forum, where parents can meet and discuss the materials they have access to, or even ask questions from the specialists. The online discussion is also a perfect tool for the disabled people, who are not able to move out of the house, but still have children and want to teach them English.

**Project Plan**
The pilot project is to start in October 2012, when three 80-min workshops are to be organized at the ETRC. As a result, the pre-service and in-service teachers will learn how to reorganize their current material using Socratic Questioning. Their lesson plans are to be posted online. Peer assessment will take place starting from the second half of the year. The teachers in kindergartens will observe each other’s lessons and use an observation chart to peer analyze the lessons they observed. In this way, they will be able to see how their lesson plans worked and what to change. In the end, they will be able to adjust and improve their lesson plans.

**Design**
The purpose of the project is to develop EFL curriculum for young and very young learners, based on Critical Thinking approach. There is no accredited program for English teaching at this age in the Republic of Moldova, so it will help parents involved in teaching their children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Learning/Training Activity</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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| 1. By the end of the 80-min workshop, the pre-service and in-service teachers will be able to apply Socratic Questioning in their lesson plans. | - Objectives of the curriculum for young learners
- Characteristics of young learners
- How children learn
- Content of English teaching material
- Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Socratic Questioning
- CT theory | - Presentation of the characteristics of young and very young learners
- Three workshops on CT
- Socratic Questioning | • Lesson plan using Socratic questioning |
| 2. In six months, the parents will be able to analyze materials posted online and discuss them according to the objectives listed. | - Objectives of the curriculum for young learners
- Characteristics of young learners
- How children learn
- Content of English teaching material
- Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Socratic Questioning
- CT theory | - Involvement in teaching their children English, according to the lesson plans posted online | • Children’s performance in English: the more you involved you are in your child’s activities, the better results he/she has |
| 3. In six months, the pre-service and in-service teachers will be able to develop a first draft of the EFL curriculum as a result of the lesson plans implemented in classroom. | - Bloom’s Taxonomy
- Socratic Questioning
- CT theory | - Interactive workshop
- Online communication | • EFL draft curriculum for young and very young learners |

**Rationale for Sequence**

Even if the teacher trainees were to be familiar with the Socratic questioning, the workshops will help them refresh the related theory and compare their knowledge with that of their colleagues. The workshops and peer assessment concluding with lesson plans is the result of their work. Furthermore, to make all materials public and accessible to all the stakeholders, they will be posted online. Finally, the final document is not an online lesson plan: it is the first draft curriculum elaborated by the teachers themselves. The purpose of this curriculum is to develop the children’s communicative skills.

**Development**

(Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction)

1. **Gain attention**

I will draw participants’ attention with two video recordings: 1. Two children speak, one of which gives questions, like “Hi, how are you? Have you been to the library today? Are you going to the cinema tonight?”, while the second child keeps saying “Yes”, without asking anything his interlocutor. so, the dialogue is dull and uninteresting.

The second dialogue will include the same two children, communicating, by asking each other different common questions. So, the dialogue becomes attractive, as it is transformed into a nice talk.

The aim of this short activity is to draw teachers’ (and parents’) attention to the fact that it is important to teach our children to ask questions.
2. Inform learners of objectives

• Upon completing this workshop, you will be able to discover the importance of developing EFL curriculum for young and very young learners,
• Upon completing this workshop, you will be able to apply Socratic Questioning in EFL activities, and
• Upon completing this workshop, you will be able to apply a different approach in communicating with the parents of the children you teach.

3. Stimulate recall of prior learning

• Take three minutes to think over your last meeting with a parent: How was she/he involved in discussion on his/her child’s performance? Discuss in pairs. And now, share it with the class, if you wish.
• Let us make a list of the behaviors of (very) young learners.
• Let us make a list of the behaviors of (very) young learners she/he should possess in order to go hand in hand with modern world.

4. Present the content

• So, after analyzing the list of the characteristics the (very) young learners should have, we can conclude that communication is the key to success. In such a way, I would like to present you the key to this success: Socratic Questioning. (At this point, the theoretical part will be presented).

5. Guide learning

Handouts on the Critical Thinking approach.
Critical Thinking verbs, Bloom Taxonomy, Socratic Questioning, etc.

6. Elicit performance (practice)

We do the exercise on questions: the different levels of questions. We practice, and I ask in turns.

7. Provide feedback

*Even you are teachers, you forget about questions, and about the fact that giving questions in a conversation is as important as giving answers, even more. That is why it is important that we develop an EFL Curriculum for the Young and Very young Learners in Moldova. We should start from the beginning.*

8. Assess performance

Writing down three objectives each will prove the fact that the teachers are prepared to start working on the lesson plans, which will be combined in a bigger document – the EFL Curriculum for Young and Very Young Learners in Moldova.

9. Enhance retention and transfer

In order to see to what extent it is retained and transferred into class, we are going to have peer assessment: after writing the first lesson plan and sharing it with us, this lesson plan is to be discussed with the colleagues and implemented in practice in classroom, assisted by at least 3 colleagues.

**Implementation Checklist**

*Items*
- Flipcharts
- Markers
- Projector
- Laptop, united to the projector
- Handouts for each participant
- Video recordings
- Paper, pens

*Tasks*
- Prepare the handouts (selection of materials with the Critical Thinking as specific as needed for the workshop)
- Prepare two video recordings (two dialogues, one successful, and one unsuccessful)
- Set the projector ready
- Arrange the tables and chairs (necessary number of chairs)
**Evaluation**
The formative assessment will be performed by online discussions and surveys from colleagues and other stakeholders interested in the subject. The summative assessment will be realized by monthly lesson plans and the peer assessment during the lessons attended. Also, the content of the draft curriculum by the end of the year will be an indicator of how well we performed in our activity.