

## Sound boxes

The Sound boxes in the Montessori class constitute the basis of a matching exercise. They help a child distinguish sounds, which is a very good tool for the introduction of foreign languages. Speaking and listening skills are not separable. The better and the more developed the hearing, the better the chance of imitating sounds correctly. In my classes, children are given many opportunities to hear French in order to speak it themselves. One of the courses I use with my six to seven year olds is accompanied by a story tape that the children follow each week. This enables them to hear in the tape the words they have just learned. It also enables them to hear other genuine French voices in addition to mine.

I also use songs and sound games such as sound lotto games, especially with animal sounds. Sound can be introduced as part of the routine of the lessons, such as a whistle to start and finish a treasure hunt or to signal the end of games.

Meaningful noises surrounding the children will benefit them and keep them focusing throughout the lesson. Learning in a lively environment that stimulates their sense of hearing all the time can only develop their attention and their concentration. I insist on the word 'meaningful' as any other noise easily interferes and distracts.

## Feeling materials

Children enjoy feeling objects. After all, this is how babies start to learn about their environment. By feeling the sorting objects and the fabric squares, children use their sense of touch to distinguish between shapes and textures, and decide on the identity of the object they feel.

They have to think and they have to use their judgement. Feeling games are some of my favourite games and I use them regularly in my lessons because they always provoke a lot of excitement. Every feely bag the children have to delve a hand in gives them great pleasure as they anticipate and make every effort to think and remember the French words and the structures they need. After teaching animal names for instance, I put about five small animals in a bag, making sure



Hannah and Katie (aged 6) playing a sound lotto game.

the children already have a mental picture of their shapes. I often plan feely games as a means of assessment, especially at the end of term. To me it is primarily an exercise in vocabulary that is under cover of a popular game. The game aspect is all the children see.

Feeling games can be done with children aged at least five years old because of the need for abstraction.

Feeling with the hand is important throughout the rest of the lessons too, which is why I insist that all the children from the age of three should touch props, handle games pieces, play cards, and give objects to each other. There



Katie (aged 6) feeling an object in the feely bag (look at the concentration!)

must be a 'hands on' approach to learning a language efficiently. When the children learn a new word, for example *un chat*, they see a toy cat and they hold it, pass it to each other, say its name and feel it at the same time.

By doing so, they remember *un chat* much better than if they sat back and had to visualise a cat. We are indeed very far away from traditional methods where children sit far away from the teacher and watch!

## Smelling bottles

The scent bottles are designed to stimulate the sense of smell, which in turn stimulates the mind and brings about new knowledge, so why not use the principles of the scent bottles and introduce vocabulary or even grammatical structures? I use a bottle smelling exercise with five to seven year olds in order to introduce likes and dislikes. It works very well because it becomes a game from the onset. Children have various tastes and this creates diversity. One child will enjoy the smell of cinnamon, the other will not, thus giving me a perfect opportunity to introduce the French equivalent to "I like" and "I don't like". We do not go any further than that; we strictly concentrate on the basic grammatical structure without making a sentence.

The children are unaware that they are creating a pattern with a subject and a verb, conjugating the latter in the present tense and making it into a negative all at once! They are far too busy smelling my spice rack to notice. 🍷

• In Part 2 in the Summer issue: The Lessons. Topics include: Choosing the vocabulary, Silence is important, and Communicate enthusiasm.