



Ten months around the world

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For a Bilingual Generation (FBG) is a new emerging enterprise promoting English language acquisition in the early years of childhood education. During their ten-month-long programme, the teachers and children travel around the world and visit the main English-speaking countries where they discover and learn about the local culture, flora and fauna. Studying different countries not only enriches and makes an ESL activity a more entertaining and better experience for the children, it also allows children to observe and marvel at the world's beauties. By the end of the ten months, it is expected that the programme participants will learn to respect other cultures and accept otherness. To this end, the programme encourages children to be curious and open to new experiences. Not only about foreign language acquisition, FBG also provides a complex approach to personality development that takes place in English.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), foreign language acquisition (FLA), early childhood, bilingualism, study program

The reason behind developing the programme

All children are born with the potential of language acquisition. As there is a similarity between the acquisition of first language and non-native language, all children can become bilingual (Kovács & Trentinné Benkő, 2016).

A means of communication in a multicultural society that promotes understanding and the respect of cultural differences, non-native language learning (NNLL) plays a key role in this time of globalisation (OECD, 2012). Since the Barcelona European Council of March 2002, early foreign language acquisition has become a main objective of EU language education policy. However, Member States (including Hungary) have not made enough effort to progress towards this agreement. Despite the agreement on improving the mastery of basic skills by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age, in Hungary the compulsory instruction of NNLL only begins in the fourth grade of primary education (243/2003. (XII. 17.) Korm. rendelet a Nemzeti alaptanterv kiadásáról, bevezetéséről és alkalmazásáról). Although several pre-primary institutes provide bilingual environments, as there are no elaborated, early foreign language programmes, the institutes themselves need to create their own programmes. Unless they adopt a known programme from abroad, their institutes' credibility can therefore be viewed as questionable (Morvai & Poór, 2006).

While the number of these institutions has potentially grown in the last ten years, we still do not possess statistical data regarding their actual number or the



content, outcome, and quality of the activities. These oversights therefore raise questions regarding the efficacy of early childhood foreign language acquisition in an institutional setting (EMMI Oktatásért Felelős Államtitkárság, 2012). To take a step forward, good practices are obviously needed. By discussing the good practices and research results our programme has reaped, it is our intention to add to the professional discourse surrounding modern pedagogical approaches and promote methodological culture in the field of early years' language acquisition.

During the ten-month-long programme, the teachers and children travel around the world and visit the main English-speaking countries where they discover and learn about the local culture, flora and fauna. Studying different countries enriches and makes an ESL activity a more entertaining and better experience for the children. While letting the children observe and marvel at the world's beauties, they will learn to respect other cultures and accept otherness. FBG's goal is to attain a world without prejudice where the children speak at least to two languages (their mother tongue and another non-native language), an ability that could potentially bring different cultures closer to one another.

Scholars, (e.g. Brown, 1980; Chastain, 1988; Kramersch, 1993; Byram & Morgan, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Holló, 2008; Bajzát, 2013) strongly emphasise that foreign language learning (henceforth: FLL) and second language learning (henceforth: L2) is thorough when its cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking are taught alongside language-related aspects. In other words, the two sides of any language's 'coin' must be integrated into the student's learning environment in a mutual way.

Culture and foreign language

First published together in 1879, the words and melody of the nursery rhyme, *Baa, Baa Black Sheep*¹ (Fuld, 2000) have remained famous and beloved by most ESL teachers to this very day. Although little is widely known about the origins of nursery rhymes, most contain some important historical facts about their nation. For example, *Baa, Baa Black Sheep* is about a medieval wool tax, imposed in the 13th century by King Edward I. Under the new rules, the price for one-third of a sack of wool went to the king, while the second third went to the church and only the remaining third to the farmer. It can therefore be stated that when teachers expose children to vintage nursery rhymes, they are engaging them in a centuries-old tradition (Burton-Hill, 2015) and mediating values rooted in another culture (Magnuczna, 2015).

Language and culture form an inseparable unit that has both pragmatic and linguistic manifestations (Kramersch, 1993). The vocabulary of languages vary from one another for the following reasons. On one hand, words originate from the physical environment a people were surrounded by. Furthermore, a vocabulary of a language also mirrors the process of conceptualisation. Last

¹ Lyrics: Baa, baa, black sheep, / Have you any wool? / Yes, sir, yes, sir, / Three bags full; / One for the master, / And one for the dame, / And one for the little boy / Who lives down the lane. / Baa, baa, black sheep, / Have you any wool? / Yes, sir, yes, sir, / Three bags full.

but not least, the historical background, the mode of life, and the sociocultural milieu of a nation highly effects its vocabulary (Pont HU, 2019).

According to Dorottya Holló, teaching foreign languages should be built upon the 'Integrated teaching of language and culture' model, as the communication is only successful if both the appropriate linguistic and cultural competences are acquired (Holló, 2008).

To develop their critical cultural awareness, students need to be able to compare cultures and analyse the results (Bajzát, 2014). When meeting with other cultures, certain phenomena are going to be explored from another angle in a process that furthers the holistic apprehension of situations and leads to increased open-mindedness. Educating people about cultures may not only develop a more tolerant mind-set but also enhance non-native language learning as well. Teaching in an open-minded and tolerant way may nurture global understanding (OECD, 2012). When comparing our own culture, customs, and mother tongue with that of other countries, we become aware of both the differences and the similarities between them, thereby deepening knowledge regarding our own culture and language (Byram, 1997).

While discovering the flora, fauna, and traditions of English-speaking countries, the children are exposed to some authentic materials that aid them in developing a valid image of another culture. Their language acquisition is built upon these real-life phenomena, a connection that guarantees a high level of motivation and activity on the part of the children (Szepesi, 2016). During the organisation of the learning process, the foreign language is not the main goal, but rather the tool utilised to acquire a specific content.

Topics and contents

At FBG we invite children to join us on a ten-month long adventure throughout which we visit eight different countries. Each month (or in two cases: one-and-a-half months) symbolises a different project, i.e., a journey circumnavigating a specific country. These four- to six-week-long projects are built upon the icons, landscapes, traditions, customs, art, children's literature, and holidays found in each country. It must also be mentioned that each project has its own characters who were created with the purpose of becoming role models for the children. As such, these characters are endowed with the most important moral virtues, such as prudence, justice, benevolence, etc.

London, England

Without doubt, England comprises the cradle and heart of the English language. The winding roads and rolling, green hills with old castles are like locations in a fairy tale. This impression is not far from the truth, given that – due to Great Britain's status as a constitutional monarchy – real princes and princesses live there, not to mention the Queen herself! Through the example of the Royal Family, the children learn about the members of a family. When it comes to Buckingham Palace, we naturally discuss the presence of the Queen's Guard standing sentinel in front of it; this example provides the perfect opportunity

to introduce the topic of clothing. One of the main icons of England is the double-decker bus, an iconic way to learn about the theme of traffic. Nor can it be denied that London is famous for its rainy weather: based upon our original game entitled *Mr/Mrs Big Ben*, we visit London's world famous clock tower and ask for a weather forecast from him. From Cheese Rolling contests and Apple Day, to the Maypole and Morris dancing, followed by Halloween and Bonfire Night, England is rich in traditions and customs. Thus England comprises one of the two, six-week-long projects.

United States of America

USA consists of 50 states, one federal district, and various islands that, together, comprise a federal republic even if each state has its own atmosphere. Our week 'spent' in California mainly focuses on this state's incredibly diverse array of landscapes. From the surf beaches and famous cities to vineyards, rugged mountains, forests, and deserts, California's flora and fauna are very vibrant. During our visit to Hawaii, we make Tiki Masks and flower leis and also learn about the spirit of aloha while discovering some volcanoes. Since Thanksgiving represents one of the biggest holidays in the USA, we visit Old MacDonald's farm for a beautiful thanksgiving dinner and also learn about farm life. Cowboys and Indians have a long history together. We make an attempt to connect the two by means of the topic of horses, wherein we learn about acceptance and kindness. Visiting the Statue of Liberty gives us the opportunity to observe and learn about the body parts. We cannot leave the country without visiting Washington D.C., where the president shows us around the White House, thus initiating children into the parts of the house. The USA forms the second, six-week-long project contained in the programme.

Hungary

December is the month of Christmas, a holiday that is all about the family and the household. This is the only month when we do not travel abroad. During our Hungary project we celebrate Saint Nicholas, use Advent to prepare and remember the real meaning of Christmas and decorate our group Christmas tree. We learn about the parts of the house while taking an imaginary trip through our own home while we also examine traditional Hungarian clothing.

Canada

We start the new year by taking a trip to snowy Canada, where children have the opportunity to become familiar with a few winter sports. Because of the cold weather, it is important to dress up properly so we also learn about winter clothing. Of course, the snowy weather is not only for sports like skiing, but for other winter activities like building a snowman, getting into a snowball fight, ice fishing, etc. We close our four-week-long programme with a trip to a grove of maple trees, where we watch how the sap used for making maple syrup is extracted from Canada's famous symbol, the maple tree, and we also taste maple syrup on our freshly made, steaming hot pancakes.

Scotland

In February, we visit the beautiful world of Scotland where we take a long hike around Loch Ness and observe its natural environment. Meeting Nessie is not only a great pleasure for the children, but also a relief as they realise that it is not a monster after all. Right after our lakeside adventure we take the train to Edinburgh to see a famous bagpipe concert. This event gives the children the chance to get to know some musical instruments, like the traditional Scottish bagpipe. We also observe traditional Scottish clothing during the concert and highlight the fact that not only girls wear skirts. Our final tour in Scotland leads us to a Viking family where we learn about their lifestyle, traditions, and clothing. To close our journey, we take an adventurous ride on a real Viking ship.

Ireland

To mark the occasion of Saint Patrick's Day, in March we travel to Ireland to visit Dublin's famous Saint Patrick's Day parade. While admiring the colourful and vibrant elements of the carnival, we discuss all the shapes and forms we can find there (shamrock, flag, etc.) During our Irish journey, children have the opportunity to listen to some tales about mischievous leprechauns. We discover all the colours of the rainbow while sliding down one in search of a pot of gold. On St. Brigid's feast day, we get to know and make one of the most famous Irish symbols, a Saint Brigid's Cross. According to Irish custom, this symbol protects the home from any type of harm, including illness. We take this occasion to talk about health and how to stay healthy.

Australia

The only nation that is also a continent, Australia is a land like no other. Its isolation means that much of its flora and fauna is very different and can be found nowhere else. With their fluffy ears and large, spoon-shaped noses, koalas are one of the most famous icons of Australia. While taking a trip to visit a koala family in the eucalyptus forest, children recall their knowledge regarding family members. The other symbolic animal – on that appears on the Australian coat of arms and on some of its currency – is naturally the kangaroo. There is nothing cuter than a little joey peeking from its mom's pouch, a glimpse of an unfamiliar kind of an animal that makes children especially curious. We learn about their characteristic and unique body parts. We make an attempt to find Nemo at P. Sherman, 42 Wallaby Way, Sydney, in recognition of the famous line from the children's film. Finding Nemo is not easy but other sea animals come to our help, thereby giving us the opportunity to observe and learn about their natural habitats. In their unique artwork, Australia's first people, the Aboriginals, used symbols to record stories about their lives. Dot painting is a well-recognised style used by Australia's original peoples (Caruana, 2013). Although Aboriginal art requires its own introduction, we attempt to use the technique of dot-painting to decorate the walls and share our own stories. The

didgeridoo may be the world's oldest musical instrument. We not only form a band but we make our own dot-painted didgeridoo.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, we learn that the kiwi is not only a kind of fruit but also a very famous bird that cannot fly. This little strange bird introduces the children to a sustainable healthy lifestyle and also expands their knowledge regarding environmentally friendly ways of living. When making our own greenhouse, we pay attention to using only renewable energy sources. While marvelling at the mesmerising landmarks found in New Zealand, we also observe the variety of birds and trees and discuss how we can protect our one and only world, Mother Earth. As poor waste management contributes to climate change and air, water, and soil pollution, by means of good practises we motivate children to recycle more and landfill less. Beyond these activities, we also practice how to herd sheep, as if we were shepherd dogs racing across a never-ending green meadow. To gather, split and move a herd of sheep, we first have to learn directions.

Kenya, Africa

The continent of Africa can boast of quite a few world records. It is home to the largest land mammal, the African elephant, the tallest mammal, the giraffe, and the fastest mammal, the cheetah. Africa has the biggest national parks and wildlife conservation areas in the world (Estes, 1996). When we learn about these wild animals, we visit a local elephant orphanage. The children get to know the daily routine of baby elephants and how to take care of them. During the visit to the elephant nursery, they come to realise that their day is not so different from that of the elephants. Other than its impressive wildlife, Africa is the cradle of humankind. More than 3,000 different groups of indigenous peoples live there who all have their own language and culture. Although these groups may differ from one another in several ways, there is one thing that they all share: a passion for dancing. The local children will show us some moves and in exchange we teach them what the moves are called in English. When it comes to Africa, we have to talk about its various kinds of geography. While more than half of the continent is covered by grassland and savannah, there are also rainforests, a desert, the highest mountain, the longest river, the second largest lake, and the fourth biggest island (Estes, 1996). These world records give us the chance to talk about opposites and learn how to make comparisons.

It is particularly important to mention that repetition plays a substantial role in our programme. Although we travel to different countries each month, we have built our programme in a way that the overlapping similarities give the children the opportunity to repeat, practice, and polish their knowledge about topics as many times as necessary. Positioning the same content within a different context makes children use their vocabulary in various situations (Márkus & Trentinné Benkő, 2014).

An English activity at FBG

An activity at FBG lasts for 90 minutes, a period that may at first seem long, especially in the case of three-year-olds. When creating the programme, special attention was paid to the structure of the activity. It is due to the following reasons the duration of our activities is neither exhausting nor overwhelming for the children.

The rituals of travelling

We start each of our activities with the same rituals, a habit that we use as a warm-up exercise. Our goal is to energise and ‘tune’ the children to English. First, we search for our destination on our carpet that has a map on it. This convenient aid helps children develop their geographical skills. All group members have their own passports where they can collect flags and stickers by completing tasks and the journeys themselves. We start our imaginary travel by going to the airport. After going through the check-in and gate, we finally depart from Hungary with a song and head to our final destination.

Each project in our programme has its own theme song, most of which are original works written by our teachers. These songs contain the characteristics and icons of the country. We greet the country we are visiting by singing the theme song upon arrival. When writing songs, we endeavour to convey the countries’ special features both in melody and vocabulary. On our way home, these rituals repeat at the end of the activity when we travel home.

Vocabulary – Flashcards

After landing, we meet some locals (the project’s own characters) who will show us around the country. After their introduction, the new topic is introduced as well with the help of flashcards. We found this method to be the most useful and effective as these cards help us illustrate our sayings in a fun way and support the development of logical thinking, memory, creativity, and observation skills. By means of this approach, the children have the opportunity to acquire the foreign language in a way that is more suitable to their age. Fun games with flashcards lead children to success, which generates positive emotions in them. This sense of motivation arouses their interest and creates a thirst for repetition.

Songs, rhymes, musical games

It cannot be denied that songs, rhymes, and musical games form the bulk of the activity and play the biggest role of all in providing children with a positive experience that simultaneously increases their confidence in speaking a different language. Singing songs, telling rhymes, and playing musical games activates their vocabulary and spurs their appetite for using the English language.

With the tools of music pedagogy, musical skills like a sense of rhythm, singing skills, and improvisation skills are developed. Music is also a powerful

tool when it comes to language development. When children sing, they practice the pronunciation of words and memorise lyrics. While singing or rhyming, children use the foreign language without even noticing it, a factor that improves their self-esteem in speaking English. These kinds of games also aid the development of rule consciousness and social skills. Songs paired with motions help children practice gross motor skills. In fact, Total Physical Response (Asher, 1969) is one of the methods we use. To mention a further factor, music pedagogy plays an important role in memory development. During these activities children not only learn the song's lyrics but also the rhythm, melody, new foreign phrases, and the rules that apply to each musical game as well.

Although several amazing children's books are filled with songs, rhymes, and musical games, we often find ourselves creating our own material. To reach its goals, our programme requires a special type of children's literature. We compose songs, write rhymes, and create musical games with attention to the process of introducing a new culture. We take great care in making these materials educational, fun, entertaining, and a musical experience. Hungarian children's literature is full of circle games² which often contain a dialogue. These dialogues motivate children to speak. Unfortunately, English literature lacks these special kinds of circle games. It was based upon our knowledge of Hungary's unique forms of circle games that we were inspired to create, for example, the *Mr/Mrs Big Ben* game (England) during which the children can conduct a conversation with the Big Ben about the current weather. Another example of this cross-cultural adaptation is the *Maple Syrup Song* (Canada) which shows us exactly where maple syrup comes from. Another song called *Blow Wind, Blow* explains the origins of windstorms or other types of weather-related phenomena.

Arts and Crafts

In a child's early years, arts and crafts activities offer one of the most effective opportunities for foreign language acquisition as this kind of pastime focuses on the children's actions. Beyond the vocabulary connected to a given topic, during these activities they can learn the names of the used tools, colours, shapes, and a range of practiced movements as well. It is important to awaken their desire to create, use their creative self-expression, and help them experience the joy of creation. Arts and crafts activities develop a sense of direction, fine motoric and graphomotor skills, and enrich children's fantasies.

It goes without saying that arts and crafts play an important part in our programme. At the end of each project, we organise a little exhibition of all the artwork we made throughout the previous weeks with the children. We also invite parents and show them a short slideshow of the videos we made and photos we took during our trip through the given country. This event gives lends a ceremonial sense of 'pomp and circumstance' to the end to each of our journey before we head to a new and exciting land.

Puppet shows

Mainly as an ending, we build puppetry into our lessons on a weekly basis. Puppetry-based techniques not only develop the child's concentration, memory, and attention but also have great influence on speech-development. While watching and listening to puppet shows, children can broaden their vocabulary and learn new phrases. At the end of each puppet show, we give the children the opportunity to have a little conversation with their favorite story characters. This encourages them to use the foreign language, even if only to ask a short and simple question, like 'What is your favorite food?'. Our puppet shows are built upon a strong basis in dramaturgy. With the aid of puppets, music, and singing, we always strive to create a joyful and humorous environment that imbues children with positive emotions. Most of the time, the projects' own characters are the main protagonists of the stories. For example, in Scotland the children listen to a story in which the Loch Ness Monster is the protagonist. The plot is that all the animals at the lake fear the Loch Ness Monster since she yells a lot. The only thing they do not realize that he is in pain. As it turns out, he stepped into a spike. Only a little turtle has the courage to help him out. In the end, the lake animals finally start calling him Nessie instead of Monster. Another story about a mouse who wants to join a Scottish band. The only problem is that all the instruments are taken, except the bagpipe. These original stories include all the new words and songs, rhymes from the lesson, and present the icons and traditions of the countries.

Physical Education

Occasionally we do PE as activities that supply the opportunity to learn the names of certain movements, directions, tools, and actions while staying fit and healthy. During the exercises, children hear, learn, and practice different words and phrases such as numbers, colours, adverbs like 'fast' or 'slow', directions such as 'up', 'down', 'left' or 'right' and even parts of the body. Many of the countries we visit have their own traditional dance which we include in our programme as a part of Physical Education.

Reflection

We always look for opportunities to learn and develop. Thus, we embrace feedback and criticism and always reflect upon our work. We have several methods for reflecting on our teaching experiences. (a) With the help of our digital lesson plans, we always evaluate our teaching and reflect upon its outcomes. (b) After each project, we hold a workshop to analyse and evaluate the work we did with the purpose of identifying and exploring each other's practises and underlying believes. By weighing new ways of teaching, we may discover methods and tools that can improve the quality of learning. (c) We believe that both the highlights and downsides of each lesson should be shared within the enterprise, so we use a voice recorder app on our phone as a journal.

Keeping this app close by is essential in case we become inspired to compose a new song or write a new rhyme or story. (d) We have the permission from the parents to videotape the lessons. This gives us the opportunity to look back at our teaching and notice some things we had not been aware of. (e) From time to time, we give parents a reflection survey.

The popularity of early foreign language programmes is thereby paired with an emphasis on evidence-based instruction and the assessment of young learners' foreign language abilities. As we do not have achievement targets, the assessment is needed for accountability and quality assurance (Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021). We prioritise fun and ease in terms of providing anxiety free, positive evaluation experiences (Nikolov, 2016.). Recording the lessons also helps us observe and evaluate the development of the children as well. As the variety of language-related outcomes are strongly dependent on the particular model of language education curriculum (Edelenbos et al., 2006), we combined the descriptors of the English Language Portfolio (ELP), the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for young learners, the Global Scale of English and ours.

Future prospects

Assessments are moving from paper-based assessments to computer-based testing. This shift has many advantages, ranging from more efficient test creation, to faster test delivery and higher student engagement. We work with an engineer specialised in digital- and arcade games to develop a valid, reliable, easy-to-use, age-appropriate and stress-free, on-screen assessment that we can use in Early Childhood Settings. Evaluating the language performance of young children by means of digital tools is not our only plan. We believe that a good and strong collaboration between parents and teachers would highly and positively affect the children's development. This is the reason why we intend to create an English language learning app for children that will mirror our programme's goals, contents, and activities in an online space.

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Appendix A

Photos from the projects

