

# INTERDISCIPLINARY RELATIONS IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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## **Introduction**

EFL in the primary classroom might be a hard task for the teacher since the students do not have originally intrinsic motivation, they do not need the foreign language for communication in their daily life. The young learners' motivation depends on the interest raised in them through the most often seen advertisements (in English or with English words in them), the music (songs in English) they listen to, the cartoon or other films without translation they love watching, the computer games and the use of the Internet, and last but not least the interest and inspiration the activities in the FL (foreign language) classes raise.

Phillips (2000:5) sees:

- games and songs with action (relation to music and PE);
- TPR (total physical response) activities (relation to PE);
- tasks involving colouring, cutting, sticking (relation to Arts and Crafts);
- simple repetitive stories (relation to literature);

as activities that work well with children and make the English class an enjoyable, stimulating experience. To these I can add:

- short poems or rhymes (relation to literature).

All these activities provide interdisciplinary relations between English and the other subjects in the curriculum. This ensures a variety of activities in the English language classroom or transferring English for a moment in another classroom (e.g. Arts and Crafts).

Halliwell (2000) dedicates a chapter in her book *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom* to *Integrating language work and other subjects*.

In my opinion this integration ensures involving greater number of children's types of memory (Hothersall 1985) and of intelligence (Gardner 1993):

Poems and stories stimulate aural and visual receiving of information and consequently, aural and visual memory.

TPR activities and Arts and Crafts activities activate aural and visual memory (listening to the instructions and seeing the model), and motor memory (performing the instructions).

All activities in which language is used and especially rhymes and stories influence linguistic intelligence.

TPR and Arts and Crafts activities activate bodily kinesthetic and spatial intelligence.

Poems, rhymes and songs influence musical intelligence.

Team work (making postcards together, arranging an exhibition of what the students have made, reciting collectively or singing) activate interpersonal intelligence and individual work (making a postcard on one's own) activates intrapersonal intelligence.

The activities connected to poems, stories and songs influence students' emotions (emotional intelligence is a complex of the interpersonal and intrapersonal ones (Berman 2000)). The beautiful products of the Arts and Crafts activities (fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) also influence students' emotions, build their aesthetic taste and develop their emotional intelligence.

The more types of memory and intelligence we use, the more memorable words, phrases and structures become. When the students remember the new material easily, especially while having fun, they are more motivated to study the foreign language. By activating all types of memory and intelligence in the FL classroom, we contribute to their further development. And this is very important at primary school stage, because in the primary classroom we work towards the holistic development of the child.

## Interdisciplinary Relations in Practice

### 1. Autumn leaves

Aim: internalizing the colours in English

Vocabulary: green, yellow, orange, red, brown, leaf ó leaves

Grammar: singular and plural of the noun *leaf*

Level: beginners

Age: 6-8

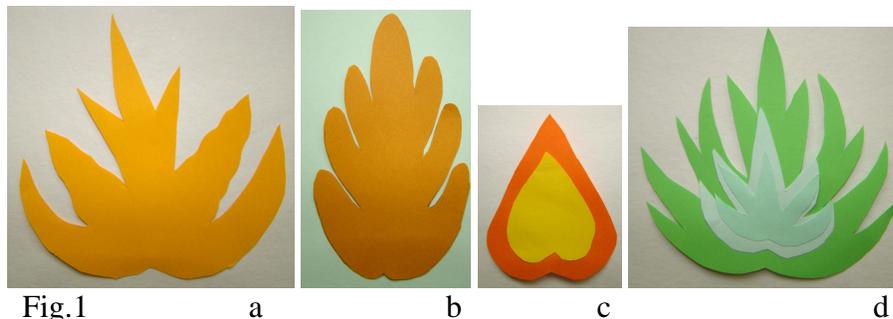
Time: 2x35 min (one class English and one Arts and Crafts)

Skills: cutting, sticking, responding to the colours in English, team work

**Interdisciplinary relations: Natural sciences (Surrounding World, Man and Nature), Arts and Crafts, Literature, PE (physical education)**

I. Talk about autumn, then continue with autumn rhymes. First introduce the colours met in them with the help of colour paper, and the word *leaf* – *leaves* using paper leaves of various colour (green, yellow, orange, red, brown). Then repeat the rhymes a few times to give the students an opportunity to remember them.

II. Cut and stick in order to make beautiful autumn leaves (fig. 1). Each student receives a kit of 8 pieces of colour paper of various size. With the younger ones you can prepare 4 leaves and 4 pieces of paper. They can make 8 leaves (fig. 1 a, b), or less if they use two or three colours for one leaf (fig. 1 c, d).



III Make a decoration for the classroom:

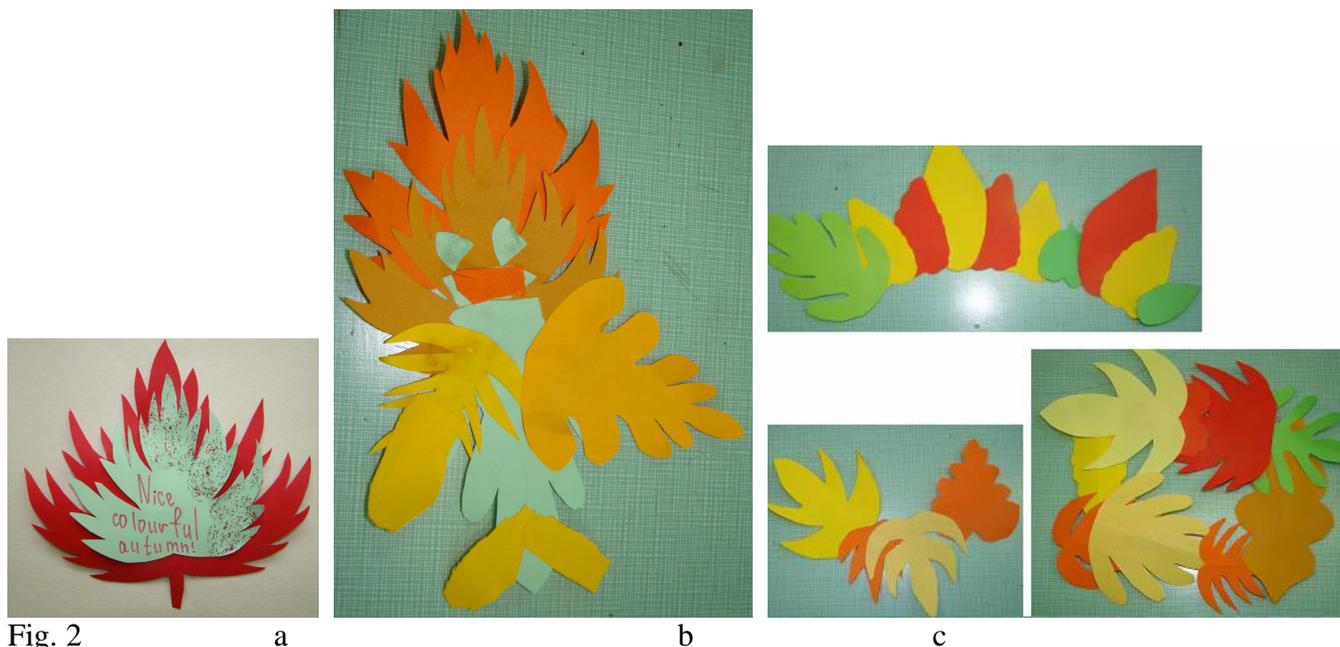
Make a panel (1<sup>st</sup> grade) or a garland (2<sup>nd</sup> grade) by the leaves: the teacher uses a needle and a string to make the garland or A1 piece of paper and glue to stick the leaves on it. The procedure is long if we want a big panel or garland, so we divide it into two parts:

- All students come in turn to add their leaves to the panel/garland saying the word for the colour of the leaf in English. The students in the classroom clap their hands if the student is right; or if the student is wrong, they stay still.
- The teacher asks for colours e.g.: Red ó a student from the first row; Yellow ó a student from the second row; Green ó a student from the third row comes out. The students raise their leaves to help the teacher choose the correct colour for all the learners to be able to participate. The rest of the class raise their hands if the student, who is going to add his/her leaf to the panel/garland, brings a leaf of the correct colour.

## Methodological comment

The initial discussion relates the foreign language class to the weather outside and the present season. This is a relation to the subject Surrounding World, moreover the students make autumn leaves. Through the rhymes the students make associations with rhymes in Bulgarian language and with Literature in general. Cutting and sticking realize relations to Arts and Crafts. The students stand up or raise their hands making a relation to PE.

Finally the students write in the centre of a leaf their feelings about autumn (e.g. beautiful golden autumn) (fig. 2 a); some of them make applications of various shapes using the leaves (fig. 2 b, c).



## 2. *Snowflakes*

Aims: Preparing Christmas decorations for the classroom; creating interdisciplinary relations to English

Vocabulary: white, snow, winter, ground, tree, park, house, car

Language functions: greetings, wishes, Christmas presents

Level: false beginners

Age: 8-11

Time: 35-40 min (Arts and Crafts)

Skills: folding, cutting, writing Christmas greetings, wishes for Christmas presents, a winter story

**Interdisciplinary relations: Natural sciences (Surrounding World, Man and Nature), Arts and Crafts, Literature, Cultural studies, PE**

I. Discussion about winter. Introducing a winter rhyme:

White, white, white!  
White is the snow,  
Falling on the ground,  
Covering the trees,  
Covering the park.  
White are the houses.  
White are the cars.  
Everything is white!  
Come to the slide!

II. Repeating the rhyme a few times.

III. Making Christmas decorations for the classroom:

The students cut out snowflakes and then write down Christmas wishes/greetings (good health, good luck, excellent marks, etc, fig. 3a) and the more material wishes for presents (a doll, a big lorry/train/truck, a piano, a computer, etc, fig. 3b). The faster students create their own stories (fig. 3c).

IV. Discussion about Christmas and arranging the decoration.



Fig. 3 Snowflakes

a

b

c

#### Methodological comment

There is a relation to Surrounding World and Man and Nature: we start discussing the season, and the weather. The rhyme makes a relation to Literature and Bulgarian language. Making decorations, folding cutting out and drawing are Arts and Crafts activities. The instructions for cutting out the snowflakes are made in Bulgarian. This lays a sound basis for making the instructions for cutting out flowers in English comprehensible (the next lesson plan). Here we have elements of snowflakes instead of petals, otherwise the procedure is the same. The discussion about Christmas makes a relation to Cultural studies. The students practise writing certain words in English and those who feel confident and willing to write more, have the opportunity to create a very short story about winter, about a snowflake, a description or a rhyme, which is also a relation to native language and literature. This is an edited version of a story by a 9-year-old girl ó the original one is suitable for interlanguage analysis:

*It is winter. It is snowing. The snowflakes are falling slowly. One snowflake falls on Sharo's house. Sharo is a little puppy. He sees the snowflake and says: "Let's play together". The snowflake says: "Yes". And they start playing together. The snowflake is flying around the puppy and he is running around happily. (Vili Terzieva 9).*

### **3. Flowers and spring cards**

Aims: Making flower decorations and cards; acquisition of the imperative

Vocabulary: colours, geometrical figures

Grammar: imperative

Language functions: giving instructions

Age: 8-11

Time: 2x35-40 min (one class English and one Arts and Crafts)

Skills: cutting, sticking, arranging postcards, writing instructions

**Interdisciplinary relations: Natural sciences (Man and Nature), Mathematics, Arts and Crafts, Bulgarian language (grammar), Cultural studies, PE**

## Lesson 1

I. Today we are going to make a spring card and a decoration for the classroom for the Palm Sunday (in Bulgaria the Sunday before Easter is a holiday of the flowers).

II. Give the students instructions how to make the flowers themselves, visualizing with actions:

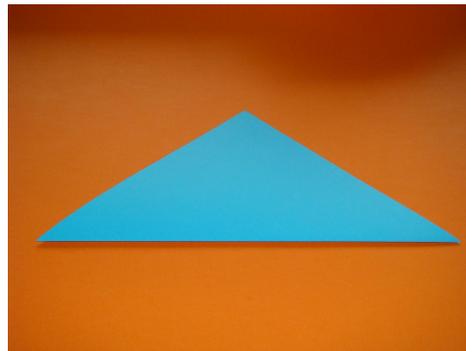
1. First make squares of various colour and size



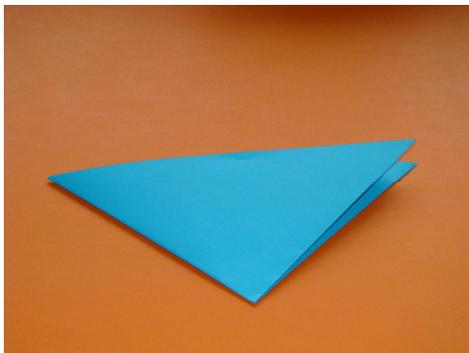
2. Take a square



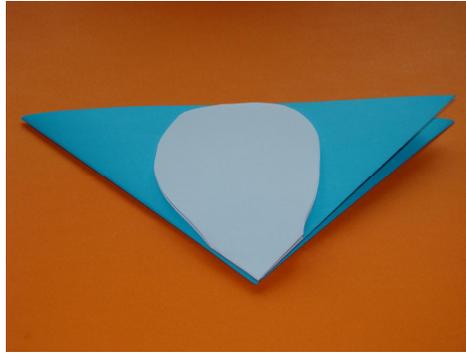
3. Fold it to make a triangle



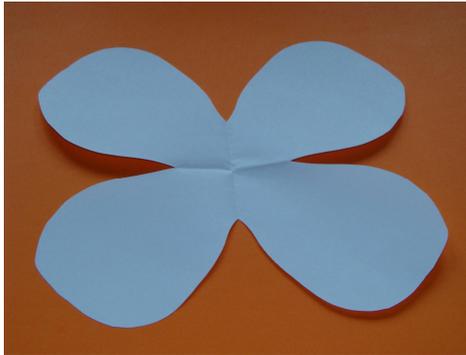
4. Fold it once again



5. Draw a petal of a flower



6. Cut it out and unfold it



This way you have a four-petal flower.

If you want a flower with more petals:

7. Fold it once again to make a smaller triangle



This is the flower you see after drawing a petal and cutting it out:



III. Give the students time for work

1. They (in pairs or teams) cut out the flowers and other elements for the cards.
2. They arrange the card and stick the elements.

IV. Physical activity time:

Stand up, please  
Raise your hands  
Move them left, move them right (3 times)  
Turn around  
Put your hands down  
Now sit down, please

V. Make an exhibition of the cards.

**Lesson 2**

- I. Your cards are so beautiful! Please, write down the instructions for us to arrange the same post card. You can use colour pens with the corresponding colour of the paper of your elements (examples in fig. 4 and fig. 5).
- II. Physical activity time  
Stand up, please!  
Put your hands forward  
Put them up  
Jump  
Jump clapping your hands  
Stop  
Hands down  
Stay still  
Sit down, please.
- III. Exchanging instructions and discussions
- IV. Write the cards to greet people with flower names you know (Violet, Rose, etc)
- V. Decorating the classroom with flowers (fig. 6).

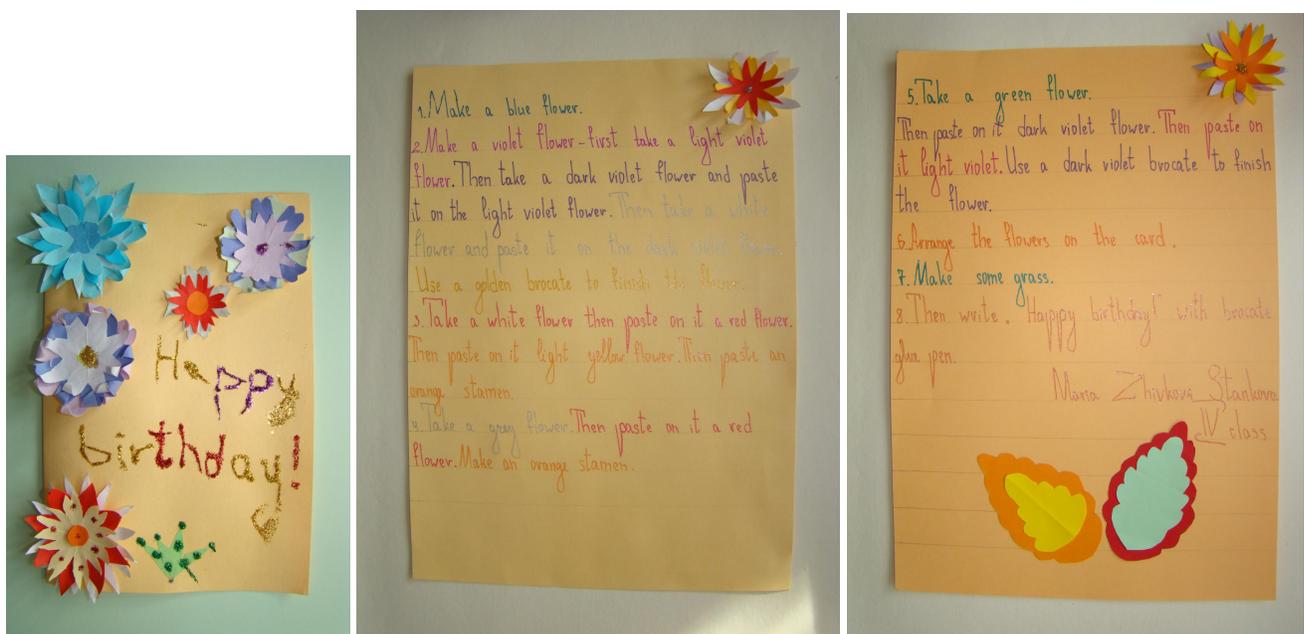


Fig. 4 A. A card designed by a 10-year-old girl

B The instructions for making the card

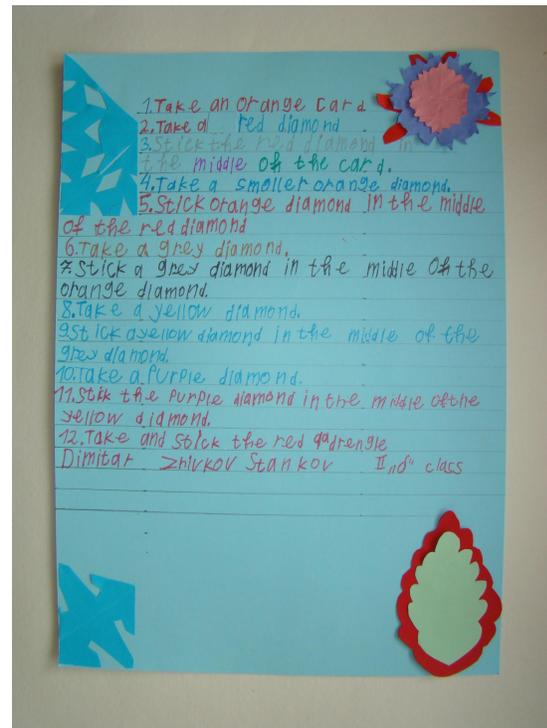


Fig. 5 A. A card designed by an 8-year-old boy B. The instructions for making the same card



Fig. 6 The decoration of the classroom

### Methodological comment

Flowers and spring create associations to Man and Nature. Receiving and giving instructions are social and communicative skills. Instructions enrich the students' experience with using the imperative mood, which is a grammatical category of the verb, so they enrich their grammar knowledge in general, practise giving instructions and acquire the structure. The lesson is related to Mathematics due to the use of various figures (square, triangle, diamond (in a student's work)) in the instructions and explanations. It is related to PE as well: in the long sessions we need a short physical activity for the hands to rest and the back to straighten. Making a decoration for a feast realizes a relation to the culture and traditions of the native country in the foreign language classroom.

The students enjoy writing with glitter (öbrocateö or öneönö) pens. They wrote quite long instructions practicing the imperative and the spelling of the colours, enjoying the activity.

## Conclusions

Interdisciplinary relations stimulate students' motivation to study English, their creativity (especially the relations to Arts and Crafts and Literature), the development of different types of memory and intelligence, contributing to the holistic development of the child. They make foreign language classes more pleasant and funny, and increase the students' willingness to talk in English, to work in the foreign language classroom, and to prepare for the FL classes at home.

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