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TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE THROUGH A VELCRO BOARD IN PRESCHOOL

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Abstract

Nowadays, in an increasingly globalised world, knowing foreign languages is very important and starting to learn a foreign language at young ages helps learn it better, as children internalize them with the same mechanisms as their mother tongue. As Internet is full of online resources for teaching English, the following work presents a manual tool for this purpose, which is a Velcro boards that can be adapted to many activities, such as games, festivities and songs. It presents a proposal of different activities based on this material, which allows children to interact with it and learn having fun, with the help of the TPR methodology.

Key words

Foreign language teaching, teaching English, Velcro board, preschool education, TPR.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, in an increasingly globalized society, knowing a foreign language is very important, especially English, which is the most universal language in the world. Learning a second language when you are a kid makes it easier to embrace it and “parents [...] can expect their bilingual children to gain specific advantages in targeted areas, such as greater understanding of language as an abstract system” (King & Fogle, 2006: 1).

The value of pre-school education has been improving and gaining importance, and even though learning a second language, in our case English, is included in the *Curriculum d'Educació Infantil* of the Balearic Islands (Spain), it isn't given the importance it needs. As Arroyo et al. underline, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has gained a lot of importance lately due to proliferation of bilingual and plurilingual centres (2015: 8), and, as we will see further on in this work, in Spain the legislation only began taking the teaching of foreign languages into account in the nineties with the *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* in the year 1990. Nowadays, in the *Curriculum* it is just said that children have to start using oral language and understand basic vocabulary and orders of a foreign language, but starting in the second period of preschool, which means children from 3 to 6 years old.

A lot of studies, as we will see further on in this document, highlight the importance of learning a second language in early childhood, proving that children at young ages have more abilities to learn a foreign language with the same mechanisms as learning their mother language. Furthermore, it is underlined that motivation is also an important factor, so learning through games, stories, songs, etc. makes it even easier for them.

1.1. Justification

From my own experience as an after-school teacher, I have seen that kids enjoy learning English by playing, singing, telling stories, doing handicrafts, etc., all in all, touching and experiencing with it. Nowadays, children use computers, smartphones and tablets a lot, which are also used very much in class. That is why I decided to centre my dissertation on the use of a more old-fashioned tool for teaching, a manual one: a Velcro board. It should be noted that, despite the fact that Internet is full of resources for kids to learn English, most of them are online.

The Velcro board is a very flexible tool that offers a lot of possibilities, starting from storytelling and learning and representing festivities and ending with learning a lot of diverse vocabulary, all in a visually and significative way. It can encompass a lot of topics and teachers can develop and improve it every time they need it, creating new materials for it, even the children can. For that objective, I will create some activities that will have the Velcro board as a part of it.

To sum up a one and only object, the Velcro board, will allow us to do a lot of activities and projects. We will be able to create new resources about what we will be doing in class, so we can up-date it every time we need it, which means more and more material and more complete. It also encourages children's participation and willingness to learn.

1.2. Objectives

As I am doing my *Practicum II* with children from 3 to 6 years old in a small school that works with learning environments and workshops, I want to create some workshops parting from the methodology of the centre. I would have liked to put it into action but, due to the current situation of the Covid-19, as we can see it in the *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, which is the government gazette from Spain, it will be impossible, as presential educational activity is suspended in all centres and stage (Article 9, *Real Decreto 463/2020, de 14 de marzo*) (BOE, 2020: 22902). We will still work with the school and create some projects so that the students will be able to go on learning in their homes, but we will not have the same experience and the opportunity to learn we would have had if this virus had not spread, so I will not be able to implement my dissertation to the school. Anyways, I will create some patterns of the Velcro board to show how to do and use them and to set some examples.

The aims of this dissertation, aside from the ones from the Curriculum that I will present after, are the following:

- To create different English activities that include the Velcro board, analysing the best options and resources to fulfil it.
- To present my ideas in a way that will help other teachers use the activities in their classrooms

2. Literature review

2.1. Legislation

Nowadays the importance of learning a second language in preschool is obvious, taking into account all the benefits it has on children of these ages. Spanish legislation began to be aware of the importance of learning foreign languages in mandatory education when the country joined the European Union. As a result of the union, the country was opened to a new globalised marketplace and society and, so, other languages. The EU has shown the importance learning foreign languages by including it in some initiatives promoted by some of its institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe. Some examples are the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2001), in which it is said that “the basic features of this model are fully developed during early childhood, but it is further developed through education and experience during adolescence and indeed throughout adult life”, and *the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training* (ET 2020 framework), which “provides opportunities to build best practices in education policy, gather and disseminate knowledge, and advance educational policy reforms at the national and regional levels” (2020, para. 1). According to Arroyo et al., there are also other global institutions that have promoted teaching other languages, especially from the 90s decade; organizations like the UNESCO and the OCDE have motivated different actuations towards promoting teaching the world’s languages (2015: 23). In Spain, this topic has first been included in the education legislation in the 90s, with the *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE), but the grade of starting educating in foreign languages was only primary school, there is nothing said about preschool. It isn’t until 2006, with the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (LOE), that it is included, where it is established as an objective of the educative system the capacitation of, at least, one foreign language and its encouragement from the second cycle of preschool (Arroyo et al., 2015: 21). The following and latest law, the *Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* (LOMCE, 2013), promotes the initiative of plurilingualism. There it is said that having contact with at least one foreign language will be encouraged during the second stage of preschool (from 3 to 6 years old), especially in the last year. The LOMCE stipulates that the law supports the plurilingualism and that students should be fluent at least in a first foreign language and underlines that the oral and reading comprehension and the oral and written expression is decisive to favour the employability and professional ambition. That is why it is important to incorporate it to the curriculum. In its third chapter, the Article 6, it is said that, within art and sport, the government sets the objectives,

competences, contents and criteria of evaluation of the basic curriculum of learning foreign languages which will require the 55% of the scholastic timetable (in the Autonomous Communities that have a co-official language). Each Autonomous Community has its own legal authority to decide at which course children should begin to learn a foreign language. In the Balearic Islands, according again to Arroyo et al., a foreign language is introduced in the first course of the second cycle of preschool (2015: 22), but it is not mandatory. In preschool, oral skills are much more important than written ones.

Focusing on the appendix of the curriculum of the Balearic Islands (*Annex del Decret 71/2008, de 27 de juny, pel qual s'estableix el currículum de l'educació infantil a les Illes Balears*), the general objectives of the area of languages: communication and representation are fixed for this period of kindergarten and preschool (from 0 to 6 years old). There it is said that children of these courses should achieve these capacities of foreign languages:

5. To comprehend the intentions and messages of other children and adults, adopting a positive attitude upon the language, the own as well as the foreign one.
14. To start the oral use of a foreign language to communicate in the in-class activities and show interest and taste to participate in these communicative exchanges. (2008: 28)

As for the contents, there is nothing said of the first stage (from 0 to 3 years old). In reference to the second one, in the section of verbal language (bloc 1), about listening and speaking, it is underlined the comprehension of oral simple texts' global idea in a foreign language, in routines and normal situations and having a positive attitude towards that language when talking about known and predictable topics to participate in oral interactions in foreign language and, in general, to all languages present in the habitual environment (2008: 32). Finally, regarding to the evaluation criteria, there is also nothing about the first stage, but about the second one it is said that children should be able to express simple messages in a foreign language orally and they should show interest to communicate in it, focusing on predictable and familiar situations and on the participation in communicative situations within the class group.

2.2. Foreign language learning theories

There are a lot of studies that show the benefits of learning a second language before 6 years old. For instance, according to a piece of research done by DeKeyser (2003) of different theories and authors about critical periods in second language acquisition, there is evidence that children

have innate mechanisms for implicit language acquisition, which allows learning the sounds, pronunciation and abstract structures in spite of their level of verbal ability “because they rely on language-specific mechanisms of implicit learning instead of on general mechanisms for explicit learning” (2003: 500). He concludes his study by saying that “somewhere between the ages of 6–7 and 16–17, everybody loses the mental equipment required for the implicit induction of the abstract patterns underlying a human language” (2003: 518).

There are also other studies, for instance the one by Guembe Erdozain (2014, in Mueller, Friederici & Mannel, 2010), that show that children from 0 to 6 years old have a big potential to learn both first and second language and she adds that, following Cortés (2001), when a kid learns a language he looks for similarities in the phonological system of the mother’s language and has the ability of learning a new phonetic system because they keep their articulatory flexibility.

In the XX century there have been a lot of studies about how to teach second languages, not only to children, but also to adults. As Wattellier (2007: 3) analyses, there are some theories of the XX century in favour of learning second languages, like *audiolinguisism*, based almost exclusively on psychological theories to explain how to acquire a second language. With time it has been proven that this theory was wrong, but there are some undeniable facts, and the author adds that there are two of them that help succeeding in learning foreign languages. Those facts are the theory of multiple intelligences of Gardner, which shows that there are eight types of intelligences and that not everyone uses them the same way, and so for teaching we should take into account all of them to be the most inclusive as possible with all our students; and the importance of motivation. The motivation, he adds that the sociological investigations show that the lack of it results in a phenomenon of standstill in the learnt language (2007: 4). Then he presents some teaching methodologies, from which I have selected the direct method, that works with imitation, focusing on the oral part, and the communicative method, which he defends is the most effective, as the aim of learning a language is the improvement of the communication and it works through the exchange of messages with other people, making them practice the language, to comprehend and to express themselves. It is important that children do not just listen to the second language, but also that they produce it in order to practice its phonemes, words and structure.

According to Berrocal Álvarez (2012: 14), who analysed the stages of development of Piaget, children still have the mechanisms that they use to learn their first language and their cognitive

development, at those ages, are easily influenced. It is through assimilation and accommodation, which means fitting new information into the pre-existing knowledge, how children create new mental schemas.

I would like to underline Krashen's hypothesis. According to Guembe Erdozain (2014), Krashen defends that an atmosphere of trust and security is needed in order that students feel free to express themselves in a foreign language. He also created the hypothesis of the natural order, which proposes that a language should be learnt first by letting students understand what they listen and later trying to make them express themselves without any pressure (Krashen, 1983, in Berrocal Álvarez, 2012: 10). What Krashen wants to emphasize is the act of learning a second language in a natural way. For that purpose, teachers should take into account the interests of the children they teach, so that it motivates them even more.

Another important theory of teaching a second language to children is the Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher, 1969). It defends that a good way to improve the learning is by accompanying it with body movements, so that the message teachers want to transmit to children will be easier understood. Asher says that connecting the memory to some repeated actions makes it easier to embrace the learning. So, by accompanying something we are saying by actions and showing the children we expect them to do something with our actions apart from our order, it is easier for them to understand and internalise it. Berrocal Álvarez (2012: 16) uses a very visual example, which is that if a teacher wants a student to grab something, when offering it he says "Take it!" and if he wants the student to give it back, he stretches out the hand and says "Give it to me", this way the student will learn this vocabulary and structures from the context. Teachers should start with simple orders and go on gradually using more complex ones. In addition, Guembe Erdozain (2014) emphasizes the fact that there are some advantages coming out of using this theory, which are that students have fun learning, they learn faster and memorize better what they have learnt.

There have also been other studies about learning through stories and songs. This way it is fun and easy and motivates the children more to learn the language. Through them, and according to Guembe Erdozain (2014: 6), values and culture are transmitted, the imagination is stimulated and it has cognitive, linguistic, social and cultural benefits, as they help children understand the world, learn new vocabulary and linguistic structures and they see different customs and ways of living. She has extracted from different studies, including Varela (2003) and Ruiz Calatrava (2008) among others, that teaching English through stories and songs have a lot of advantages.

For example, they introduce a huge range of vocabulary without kids noticing it, the vocabulary and expressions are contextualized (which helps children to understand it better), it helps practise pronunciation and encourages participation of the students, etc. But what is more important is that it motivates the children, fact that creates a positive environment and makes them feel relaxed, so they feel confident and enjoy the activity.

The research of Berrocal Álvarez (2012: 17) about second languages teaching in preschool, following studies by Murado Bouso (2010), says that children from three to four years old should take contact with the foreign language for about fifteen to twenty minutes daily and that children from five to six, it should be from twenty to thirty minutes, always depending on the response of the students.

It is important to underline that visual support at these ages is very important because, as we saw before, it helps understand better the foreign language and to motivate the students. It is also important, according to Báez Gómez (2015: 14), to teach in a context as real as possible, because this way the learning will be functional and significative. In addition, Ortega Domingo (2017) defends that teachers should reformulate the phrases children can't say properly to help them with the production of phrases and the use of formulaic language, which is using some phrases which can be used in different moments with a similar context. Some examples are *sit down* and *wait a moment*. He also adds that learning these phrases in these contextualized circumstances allows students to use them in the context where they have learnt it (2017: 10).

Finally, as López et al. (1999) underline, bilingual children have a higher social sensitivity and a better memory, perception and creativity.

3. Didactic proposal

The Velcro board can be used for many other subjects or proposals, but I am focusing on English as second language. It is important to use TPR so that children know when to take part in the activities and how. Using TPR helps them understand the instructions, questions, suggestions, and intentions of the teacher, so it makes it easier for them to learn a foreign language.

All the proposals I will present further on are based on the Velcro board. They are going to be different activities, including songs, stories, vocabulary teaching games and festivities. The board it should be made of brushed nylon or felt, so that Velcro sticks to it. There should be different ones, adapting to the different activities I propose. There should be a bigger one that can be used for most of the activities. The dimensions are not fixed because it depends on the space we have in the classroom. Anyways, I recommend the main board to be at least 60x80 cm, so that all the students can see it. All the material that can be stuck there should be made of cardboard, better if it is covered with plastic, so it is more protected, or also of Ethylene-vinyl acetate (also known as foamy or poly). The board can be stuck to a cork board with pushpins, to the wall with a tack (it should have holes or a rope to hang it there), etc. The students can also make boards and material for the activities, as it is easy and it can also help develop the vocabulary of handicrafts (for example, cut, paste, paint, colour, draw, etc.) and the fine motor skills.

I would like to highlight that these activities are not complete workshops, just part of them. They can be used as the focus of it, as to presenting material, to play games, to help telling stories, etc. It can introduce the topic and then sing a song about it or play other games with it. You can see some examples of the activities in the Annex 1.

3.1. Contextualization

The school where I am doing my practicum has a methodology based on learning environments and workshops that allows children to learn by themselves and in which the role of the adult is to accompany and guide them through their learning process. The children are all mixed up together, from 3 to 6 years old. The older ones help the younger ones to adapt easier to the school, to interiorize the rules of the centre and to do some activities (sometimes it is the other way around). The children choose which environment or workshop they are going to go according to their motivation and feelings, and they learn in an experience-based way.

They have an English workshop twice a week, to which they choose whether they want to go to it or not when the teacher offers them a ticket, as they have limited capacity (12 children). This way, in reduced groups, the teacher can be more focused on all the children and help and encourage them to speak, sing and play games. In this context, it is easy to use the Velcro board with the children, as they can participate more because there are less children than in a traditional class.

3.2. Activities

In the following subsections I am going to present some activities divided in different sections according to the type of proposal it is: a story, a song, games and vocabulary and festivities. I would like to highlight that these activities are aimed at children from 3 to 6 years old, but they can be adapted to the needs of the children and they can be modified in order to make them simpler or more difficult by, for example, adding or removing some vocabulary from the activities according to the children's age and level and to how many they are. They can be adapted according to the reaction of the children, if they are motivated to do it and show interest, making them last longer or shorter.

3.2.1. Stories

Teaching stories through the Velcro board makes it more visual and participative than holding a book. The teacher can have different backgrounds that can be exchanged and used in different stories. For example, a lot of stories have forests, houses, the sea, castles, etc. This way the teacher can have a background folder to use in all the stories and can just choose the ones they are going to use with a concrete story before performing it. To make it more extensive, for example, different parts of a house and a house from the outside can be made, with furniture that can be also interchangeable so that it makes it even more adaptable. The same way, some characters can be reused in different stories. For example, a hunter, a wolf, sheep, pigs, dogs, an old man, an old lady, etc. Finally, some objects can also be reused.

While telling the story, first of all, it should be the teacher who tells it, using the proper backgrounds and characters and showing them to the children, introducing them. While he tells the story, he should stick the characters and the different objects to the board as the story goes. Once the children know the story, they can have the characters and help the teacher tell the story by putting them the moment they appear and moving them through scenes. They can also tell the story when they know it by heart, with the help of the teacher and the other students. An example of using the board for storytelling is activity 1, The three little pigs.

Activity 1: The three little pigs	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The background of a field made of felt - The three different houses of the three pigs (straw, wood and bricks with a chimney) made of cardboard covered with plastic, so it is 	<p>The teacher is the first to tell the story.</p> <p>We place the three pigs on the field that and the wolf that approaches. Then, we say that each pig escapes to their house and show the first one: the</p>

<p>protected, with a small piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece (they should have a big window so we can see the pigs inside)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The two houses that fall when the wolf blows destroyed made of cardboard covered with plastic with a small piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - A small fireplace with a boiling water pot made of cardboard covered with plastic, so it is protected, with a small piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Three pigs and a wolf made of cardboard covered with plastic with a small piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>straw house, with one pig inside. Then, the wolf comes and blows the house, so it falls, and we change the image of the still house for the destroyed one. Then, the pig escapes and runs to the wood house. We see the two pigs in the wood house, then the wolf comes and blows and the house falls (we change again the image of the still house for the destroyed one). Then, the two pigs run to the bricks house with their brother (we see the three of them and the fireplace through the big window) The wolf comes and blows, but the house does not fall. Then, he climbs to the chimney and goes down, but there is a boiling water pot in the fireplace, so he gets burnt. Then, he goes away, and the three pigs live happily ever after.</p> <p>We can give the characters to the children, so they help us tell the story and they can also tell it.</p>
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3.2.2. Songs

It is also possible to use the Velcro board with songs. There are songs that tell stories, so it can be used as before explained. There are also songs about vocabulary in general, from which I selected two as examples (activities 2 and 3):

Activity 2: Do you like broccoli ice cream?	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain board - A title saying, “Do you like...?” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - A smaller title saying, “Yes” and another one saying “No” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - All food options as the song goes (you can find it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frN3nvhlHUK) made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>This is a song based on food and on liking it or not. It is called “Do you like broccoli ice cream?” from Super Simple Songs. It consists in saying different foods and asking the children whether they like it or not, so we could show the children the food as we sing it and stick it to the board where it says “Yes” if the song says they like it and where it says “No” when they don’t.</p>

Activity 3: I can sing a rainbow	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board (we can create a landscape on it as a background) - Different colours in the shape of half a moon (from smaller to bigger in the order we say it in the song) 	<p>This song is a very famous one, called “I can sing a rainbow”. As we sing the song, we can stick the colours to the board when we name them, and we can let children do it as well. We can give each one (or two, depending on how many children there are) a colour and they have to stick it when we sing it.</p>

3.2.3. Games and vocabulary

There are a lot of possibilities for teaching vocabulary and playing games. The main objective is learning through playing, so it is more significative. Most of the games can be interchangeable, so, for example, the bingo I propose can be about animals, numbers, or any vocabulary in general. The duration of it depends on the motivation of the children during the activity, so I will not put any timing as it is up to the teacher and the group of children. Small Velcro boards can also be made for all of the children for some activities, so they have their own.

A big plain felt board can be used for almost all activities, so the teacher does not need a lot of them for the different backgrounds. There we will stick on the different elements that we have prepared depending on the games and vocabulary.

Here I present sixteen examples of activities (activities 4 to 19):

Activity 4: Who came today?	
Aims: To learn different greetings	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plain felt board - A title saying, “Who came today?” made of cardboard covered with plastic, so it is protected, and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Photos or names of all the children and a small piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>To know who came that day to the workshop we can prepare a board and stick a photo or the name of the children who came there. This way we recognize the children and make them feel part of the class. One example would be asking “Did Maria come today?” (we know who are there, so we just say the names of the children that are actually there), we say greetings (different ones to each student, so they learn several ways of saying hello and how are you) and then that child has his/her picture or name and sticks it to the board.</p>

Activity 5: What’s the weather like?	
Aims: To learn and practice the weather vocabulary To recognize the weather	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, “What’s the weather like today?” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Images of different weathers (for example: cloudy, sunny, rainy, windy) and a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>We look at the window to see what the weather is like that day. We ask the children, with the pictures, starting with the ones that is not that day, so they also hear and know all the weather words we want to teach them. When we get to the weather that is correct, we stick it to the board.</p>

These two first activities can be done using the same board in order not to waste material as the beginning of the workshop.

Activity 6: Recognizing colours	
Aims: To learn and practice the colours	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, “Colours” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Different colours made of cardboard (covered with plastic, so it is protected) and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>First of all, we should look at the room we are in. We should ask the children which colours they see. As they name them, we stick them to the board. After that we unstick all the colours and give them to the children. We say a colour and the ones that have it have to stick it on the board. Then we let the children say the name of the colours. We can do the same to unstick them, the children name the colours they want to unstick and we or them do it.</p>

Activity 7: Bingo!	
Aims: To learn and practice the numbers To develop fine motor skills	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title that says, “Bingo!” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Numbers (the amount of them is depending on the group) and a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - A sack to put the numbers in - Different small felt bingo templates for the students with different numbers on each of them - Small pieces to cover the numbers of the templates and a small piece Velcro stick to the back of each piece 	<p>We have to make sure that the children know the numbers we are going to use, so this activity would be indicated to the older ones. We give each child a template and a few covering pieces. When everybody has a template, we take a number off the sack and say it out loud a few times. Then, we stick it in the grid where it is supposed to belong in order (for example, from one to ten). We do the same until someone has all the numbers from the template covered and says “Bingo!”. Then we check all the numbers together. If it is correct, the child who won can take the numbers from the sack and help us perform the bingo.</p> <p>For younger students, we can do the same, for example, with toys or animals.</p>

Activity 8: Throw the ball to the numbers	
Aims: To learn and practice the numbers To develop gross motor skills To develop fine motor skills	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A big felt board with numbers written in it in the shape we want (for example, divided into squares and each one has a number in it) - A small soft ball covered with Velcro - Template made of felt with all the numbers we have on the board, one for each student 	<p>We give each student a template and some pieces to cover the numbers they get. The aim of the game is to throw the ball to all the numbers. Each student throws the ball, one by one, to the board and they cover the number of their template that they have thrown the ball to. Every time they have to say out loud the number they hit. They</p>

- Small pieces to cover the numbers of the templates with a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece	have to try to throw the ball to all the numbers in order to cover all the template.
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Activity 9: Animals domino

Aims: To learn and practice the animal names
To practice fine motor skills
To practice logical skills

Materials	Procedure
- A big plain felt board - Big pieces of domino with the animals with a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece	It is played as normal domino, but with animals and stuck to the board, so everybody sees it. Every time a student sticks a piece, they have to say the name of the animals.

Activity 10: Which animal lives here?

Aims: To learn and practice the name of the animals
To learn and practice the name of the places where animals live

Materials	Procedure
- Different backgrounds made of felt of places where animals live. For example, a farm, the forest, the sea, the savanna, etc. - Different drawn animals with a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece	We have to make sure that the children know the animals and we can do that by showing them to the students and asking if they know what it is. Then, we can put a specific background and ask the children which animals live there. We can give every student an animal so that they stick it where they live.

Activity 11: Mr. Potato's roulette

Aims: To learn and practice the parts of the body

Materials	Procedure
- A plain felt board with the shape of Mr. Potato - A roulette made with a cardboard covered with plastic with different parts of the body (for example, arm, leg, mouth, eye, ear, nose, etc.) and an arrow also made of cardboard covered with plastic and stitched to it with a <i>mini brad</i> , so that it can turn, and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - Different parts of the body, as many parts as the roulette has, and all of them repeated at least one per student with a small piece Velcro stuck to the back of each piece	We start revising the vocabulary of the parts of the body and we can do that with the help of the roulette (stuck to the board). Then, one by one, the children spin the roulette and put the part of the body that they got to Mr. Potato. Then, when everybody has spun the roulette, they can see how Mr. Potato ended up. We can repeat the process as many times as we want, so that Mr. Potato gets as many parts of the body as the children want. Another version could be that every child has its own smaller Mr. Potato attached to a small felt board. They can spin the big roulette one by one and see how their own Mr. Potato ends up.

Activity 12: Dress up the doll!

Aims: To learn and practice the clothes vocabulary
To practice fine motor skills

Materials	Procedure
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A doll made of felt which has to wear only underwear - Different clothes that fit the doll drawn in cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>First, we review the clothes names, including the underwear that the doll is wearing. We can make two different ones, a boy and a girl. Then, we show the children the different clothes and tell them they can dress the doll as they want, one by one, but saying the name of the clothes they stick on it.</p>
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Activity 13: The seasons

Aims: To learn and practice the names of the seasons
 To learn and practice some weather traits
 To practice oral skills

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - Different parts of a landscape drawn in cardboard covered with plastic with the different seasons characteristics (for example, a tree with leaves, a tree without leaves, a tree with snow, etc.) with some small Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>First, we can stick to the board some landscape characteristics of a season. For example, we can show the winter ones, with the trees with snow, a frozen lake, etc., and ask them what the students what they see. We can help them by asking if they think it is cold or hot, what the white thing is (the snow), etc. Then, if they do not know, we can tell them it is winter, and we can ask them what they do in winter. When we have done the same with all the seasons, we can ask them which one is their favourite and why.</p>

Activity 14: How are you feeling today?

Aims: To learn and practice the main feeling vocabulary

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, "How are you feeling today?" made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Different faces showing different feelings (for example, happy, sad, angry, in love, nervous, surprised, etc.) made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>We show the different faces to the children and we stick them to the board. We ask them, "how are you feeling today?" and we tell them to point out the face that matches their feelings. We ask them if they know what the name of the feeling is and, if they do not, we can ask the other students if they know. If they do not, we can tell them. When everybody has already said how they feel, we tell them to pretend they are, for example, angry and point at the face it matches. Then, the children can choose which one to pretend to be.</p>

Activity 15: My family

Aims: To learn and practice the basic family vocabulary
 To develop oral skills

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, "My family" made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - Pictures that the students bring from home of their family 	<p>The teacher can begin introducing his/her family or an imaginary one, so that the children see how he/she does it. It is important that the teacher names the main members of a family so that the children can have it as a model. Then, the students can present their family to the rest of the class,</p>

- Velcro to stick to the pictures	but they do not have to feel forced to do it. The teacher can help them when they do it.
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Activity 16: Find the toy

Aims: To learn and practice the toys vocabulary
To practice oral skills about giving opinion

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, "Which toy is it?" made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it - A semi-transparent fabric with Velcro at the top, so it works as a curtain - Different toys with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of it 	<p>First, we show the children all the toys and say the name of them with their help. Then, we ask them to close their eyes and we stick a toy to the board and put the curtain on it. Then, we ask the children if they know what it is. When someone guesses it, it is his/her turn to hide a toy.</p>

Activity 17: What shape is it?

Aims: To learn and practice the geometric shapes' vocabulary
To learn and to practice the size's vocabulary
To practice fine motor skills

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, "The shapes" made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - Different geometric shapes in two different sizes: big and small made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - The shape of all the geometric shapes, a little bit bigger than the original ones made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>We show the different geometric shapes to the children and say the name. Then, we show one with the two different sizes: big and small. We ask the children "which one is the big" and then "which one is small?". Then, we give each student one piece and, after we stick some shapes to the board, they have to put it where it fits, say the name of the geometric shape and if it is big or small.</p> <p>To make it harder, we can use some of the shapes to create pictures. For example, we could use a rectangle for the body of a car, small circles for its wheels and even smaller ones for the lights, and small squares for the windows, etc.</p>

Activity 18: What does it feel like?

Aims: To learn and practice the sense of touch vocabulary (soft, hard, rough, smooth, etc.)
To develop the sense of touch

Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A plain felt board - A title saying, "How is it?" made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - Different materials with different touch qualities (for example, a sponge, a scourer, wool, rubber, wood, a bit of grass, etc.) with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>First, we show the materials to the children and let them touch them. We say some characteristics of all of them as they touch it. For example, the wool is soft and smooth. Then, we stick one to the board and ask the children to approach and say how it is. Finally, they can do the same with the eyes closed (some children don't like to have the eyes covered-up) and try to guess how is it without seeing it. Finally, they can also try to guess what material it is.</p>

Activity 19: Where do we put it?	
Aims: To learn and practice location vocabulary (high, low, right, left) To learn and practice the prepositions of place	
Materials	Procedure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A felt board with a drawing of an animal, for example, without a tail - A title saying, “Where do we put it?” made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece - The tail (if it is the object we chose we want children to stick) made of cardboard covered with plastic and with a piece of Velcro stuck to the back of each piece 	<p>We show the board with the animal and tell the children that its tail has fallen, so we have to give it back to the animal. We introduce the vocabulary of the location by showing the students the tail and pretending to stick it in the middle of it (not where it belongs). Then, we ask the children “Do I put it here?”, and they are probably going to respond “No”. So we ask them where then, and we say “Up?” and move it up, “Down?” and move it down, “Right?” and move it right and “Left?” and move it left. We have to play with it so that it ends up where it belongs. Then, we remove the tail and we ask for a volunteer to stick it with the eyes closed (some children don’t like to have the eyes covered-up) and ask the other children to help him/her stick it where it belongs. We need to help the students with right and left, because most of the preschool children, especially the younger ones, do not have the concept of lateralization interiorized. So, we can help them by saying it and helping the student that sticks the tail by helping him/her move to the side they say.</p>

Other examples of vocabulary to teach and to play with could be learning the instruments, food, actions, the senses, sports, etc.

3.2.4. Festivities

There are a lot of opportunities of teaching and playing about festivities with the Velcro board. We can tell the children, for example, Christmas stories, play with its vocabulary, sing songs about it, etc. A game could be “What did Santa bring?”. It consists of having drawing of Santa, the reindeers and the sleigh, where we place a small sack with the drawing of different toys in it. We can get out of the sack the toys and say its names, if they like them, if they would ask them for Christmas, etc. For Easter, we could also do stories, songs and games. For example, we could hide around the class some Easter Eggs so that the children find them and give them back to the Easter Bunny by sticking them to the board where the bunny waits for them. For carnival, we could dress up a doll with different costumes, and also play songs and tell stories. For Halloween, we could do a similar game as Mr. Potatoes’ but instead, Mr. Monster.

4. Conclusion

As I have said previously, it is very important to teach foreign languages to young children, because they have the mechanisms to learn it as their mother tongue, and the plasticity to learn the phonetics of it.

In a highly globalised and technological world, having manual tools is important, so that children and teachers have other resources to teach, learn and play with, taking attention off the screen. A Velcro board like the one I present, can help them achieve that goal and it offers a wide variety of opportunities and ideas to do with the younger children and also to the older ones, adapting the contents and material to them. It offers the chance of telling stories, singing songs, presenting vocabulary, playing games, and even to use it for other purposes, not just to teach a foreign language, but also to do mathematics, learning the letters, playing other games, etc.

I think it is important that teachers have a lot of background information and ideas to be the most complete and competent as possible, to adapt to children needs and to help them understand better, in this case, a foreign language, and the Velcro board could be another one to add to that background that should be every day wider.

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6. Annex 1: Examples of the materials



