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# Assessing young learners' progress in a longitudinal study: valuing learners' perception

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<http://www.ellieresearch.eu/>



**ELLiE: a longitudinal & transnational study of  
Early Language Learning in Europe  
SYNERGIES & TENSIONS**

**7 European countries:**

- Croatia
  - England
  - Italy
  - Netherlands
  - Poland
  - Spain
  - Sweden
- 48 schools
  - 1200 children  
from 6/7 to 10/11
  - Tracked for 36  
months

## Early Language Learning in Europe: reasons for an early start

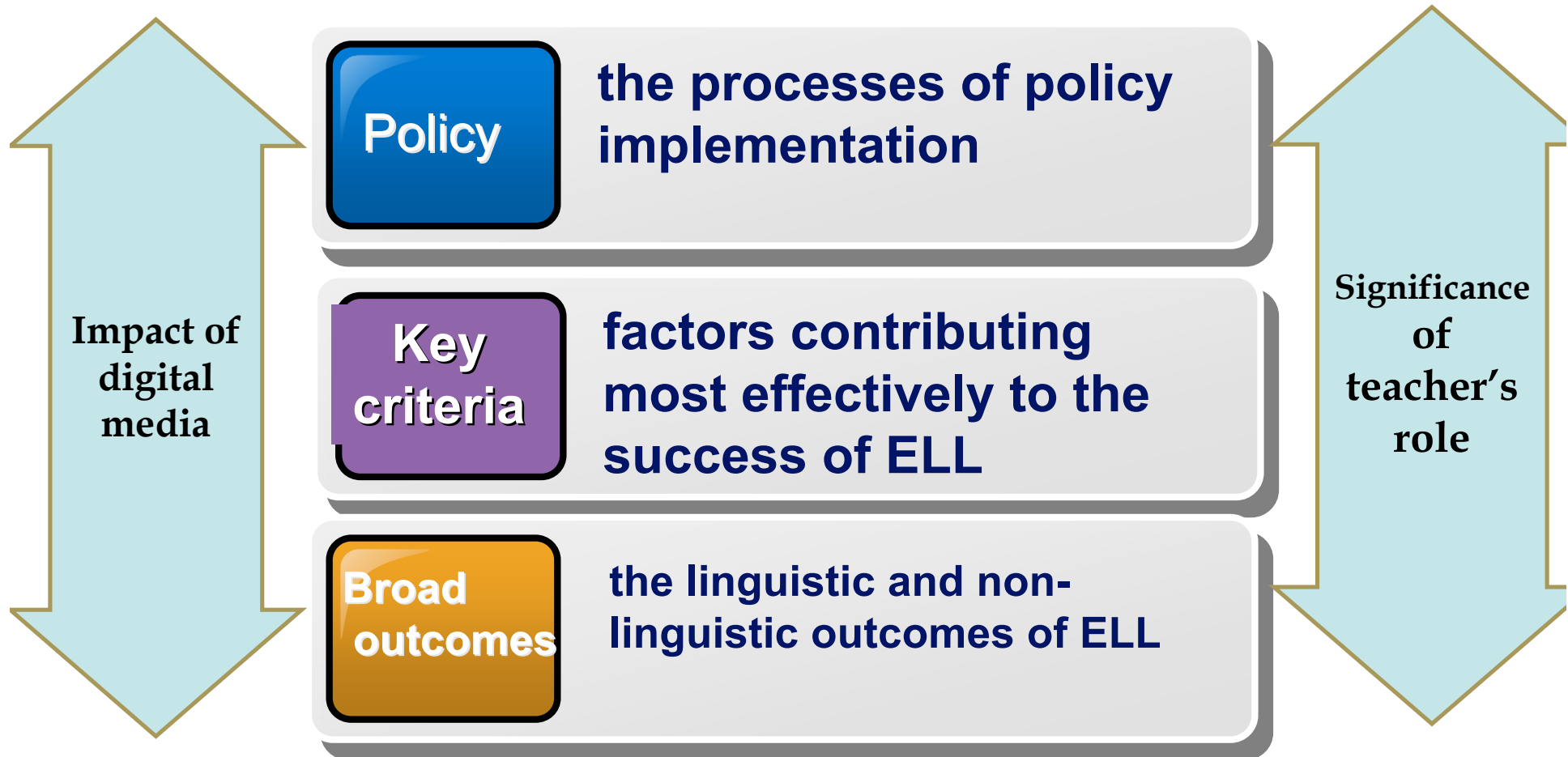
"...member states should move towards ensuring that foreign language learning at primary school and kindergarten is effective..."

European Commission (2004: 7)

“An early start by itself [...] guarantees nothing; it needs to be accompanied minimally by good teaching, by a supportive environment and by continuity from one year to the next...”

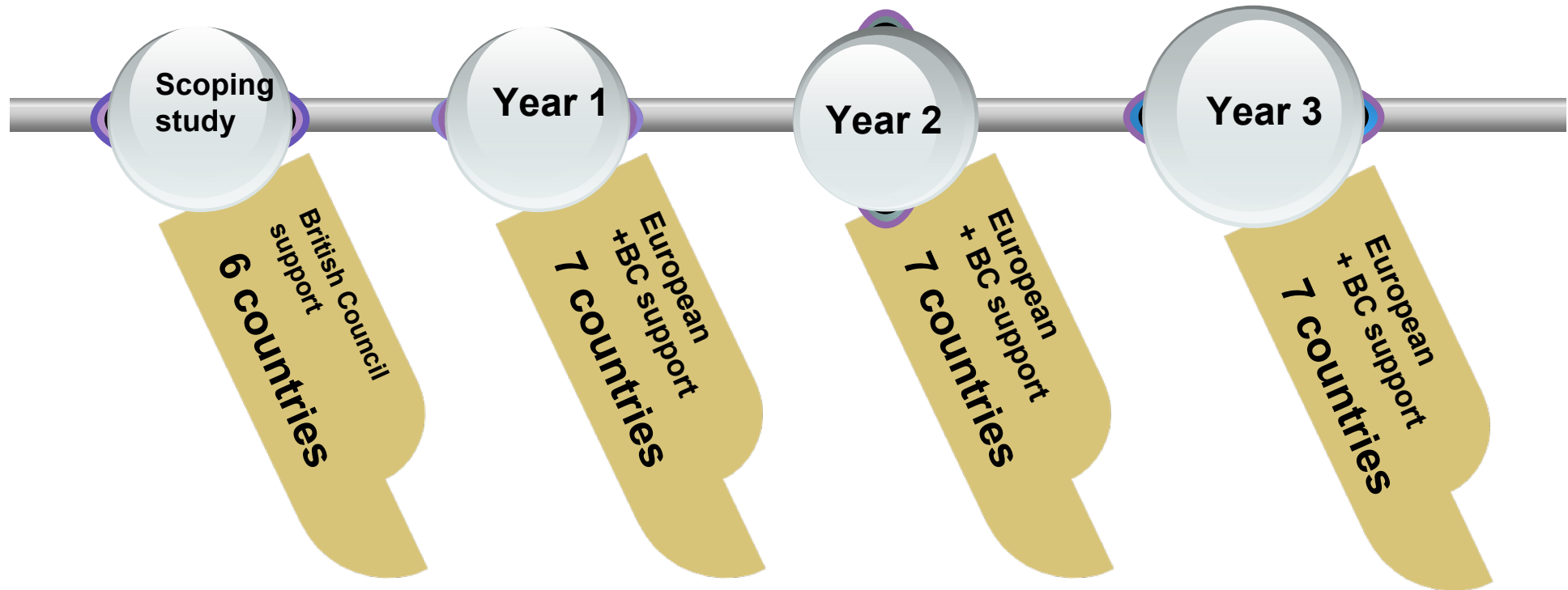
Edelenbos, Johnstone & Kubanek (2006: 147)

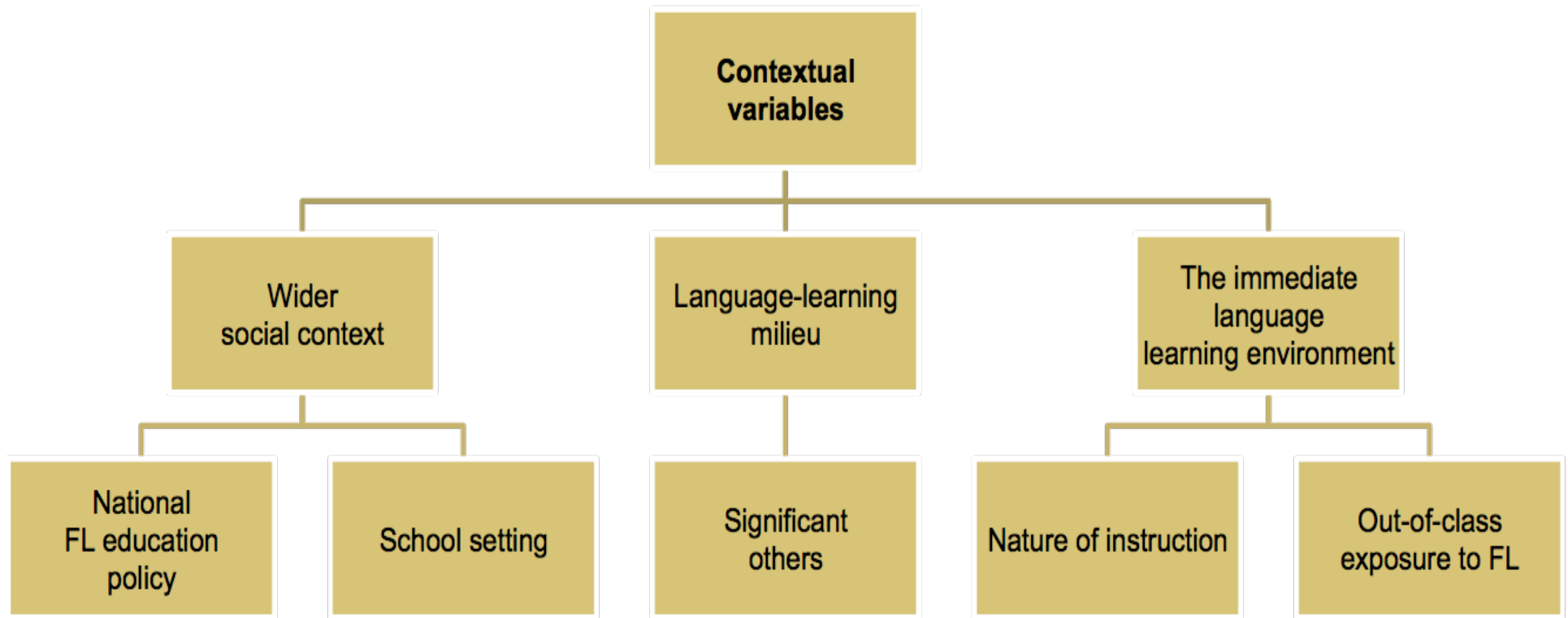
What can realistically be achieved in state schools where relatively limited amounts of class time are available for foreign language learning?



# Longitudinal perspective

2006-7 → 2007-8 → 2008-9 → 2009-10





## RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS: Sequence of administration

Research Instrument	2006-2007			2007-2008			2008-2009		
School background	√								
Principal interview	√			√			√		
Teacher interview		√		√			√		
Lesson observation		√		√		√	√		√
Lesson observation focal learners			√		√		√		√
Class Smiley questionnaire			√			√			√
Class listening tasks			√			√			
Focal learner interview			√			√			√
Focal learner speaking tasks (2)			√			√			√
Parents' questionnaire			√					√	

# Focus

**Development of young learners' perceptions of classroom activities, of the importance of FL learning and of their own learning achievement and attitudes.**

## Aim

- **Investigate Focal Learners' perception of and attitude to foreign language classroom teaching & learning.**

# ITALY: the context

## English:

compulsory from grade 1 to 5

## Teaching time:

**1st** : 1 hr per week = 30'+30'

**2nd** : 2 hrs per week

**3rd, 4th, 5th**: 3 hrs per week

## Teachers:

Primary teachers specialised in teaching English as a foreign language.

## L2 exposure:

Very limited exposure to English outside the classroom.



# FOCAL LEARNERS: composition

49 = 6/7 children in each class

Female: **26**                      Male: **23**

Country of origin:

**44** Italy,

**5 other countries** (India, Morocco, Colombia, Rumania, Poland)

**Initial selection criteria**

Class teacher selection based upon children  
achievement levels:

**2 low, 2 average, 2 high**

# FOCAL LEARNERS: instruments

Whole class & FLs' **achievement** investigated by

1. Listening tasks
2. Oral production tasks

FLs' **perception** and **attitudes** investigated by:

1. Smileys questionnaires (Yr. 1,2,3)
2. Oral interviews (Yr. 1,2,3)
3. Classroom observation chart (Yr. 1,2,3)
4. Teachers' evaluation of the FL (Yr. 1,2,3)




2006/7



2008/9

# SMILEYS

Tick one face that describes how you feel

		
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**1st year**

**How do you feel about:**

- speaking English?
- singing songs in your English classes?
- **learning new words in English?**
- listening to English?
- talking to your friends in English when playing a game?

# SMILEYS

Tick one face that describes how you feel

		
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## 2nd year

1. How do you feel about learning English this year?
2. Compared to last year, do you like English more, the same or less this year?
3. Is English easier, the same, or harder for you this year?
4. **How do you feel about learning new words in English this year?**
5. What's your favourite activity this year?  
Songs ... Stories ... Games ... Role play ...  
Worksheet tasks ... Other ...

## Changes from '07 to '08:

### 4. How do you feel about learning new words in English ?

Smileys '07 \* s4.'08 Crosstabulation

☺ = 3

(.003)

		Smileys '08 (n.4)			Total
		1	2	3	
Smileys '07	1	0	1	0	1
	2	1	1	6	8
	3	0	2	34	36
Total		1	4	40	45

# 1. How do you feel about learning English this year?

😊 = 3

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2,0	2,1	2,1
	2	5	10,2	10,6	12,8
	3	41	83,7	87,2	100,0
	Total	47	95,9	100,0	
Missing	System	2	4,1		
	Total	49	100,0		

**2. Compared to last year, do you like English more, the same or less this year?**

😊 = 3    😞 = 2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	6,1	6,4	6,4
	2	10	20,4	21,3	27,7
	3	34	69,4	72,3	100,0
	Total	47	95,9	100,0	
Missing	System	2	4,1		
	Total	49	100,0		

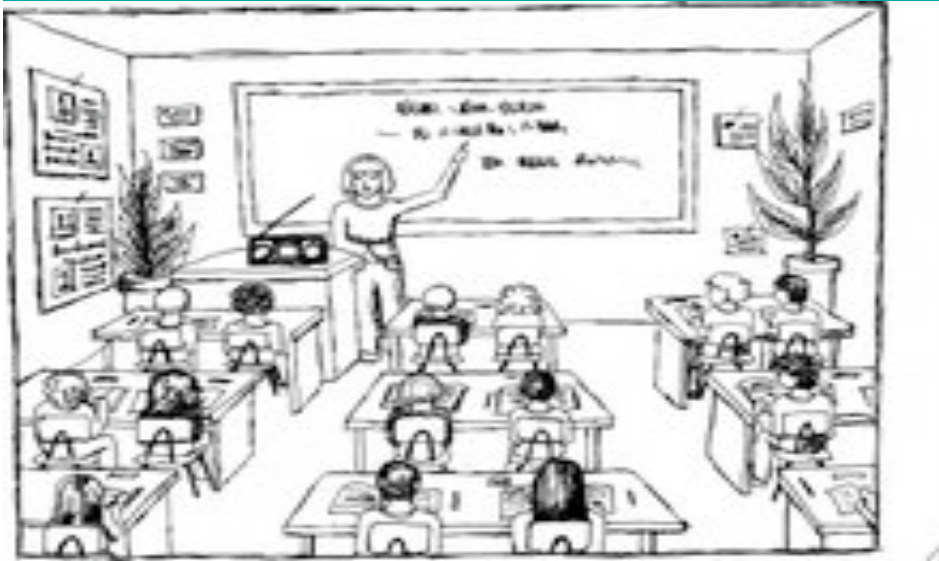
### 3. Is English easier, the same, or harder for you this year?

😊 = 3    😞 = 2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	10,2	10,6	10,6
	2	12	24,5	25,5	36,2
	3	30	61,2	63,8	100,0
	Total	47	95,9	100,0	
Missing	System	2	4,1		
	Total	49	100,0		

11. Look at these pictures of English classes.  
In which of these would you learn English best? Why?

1



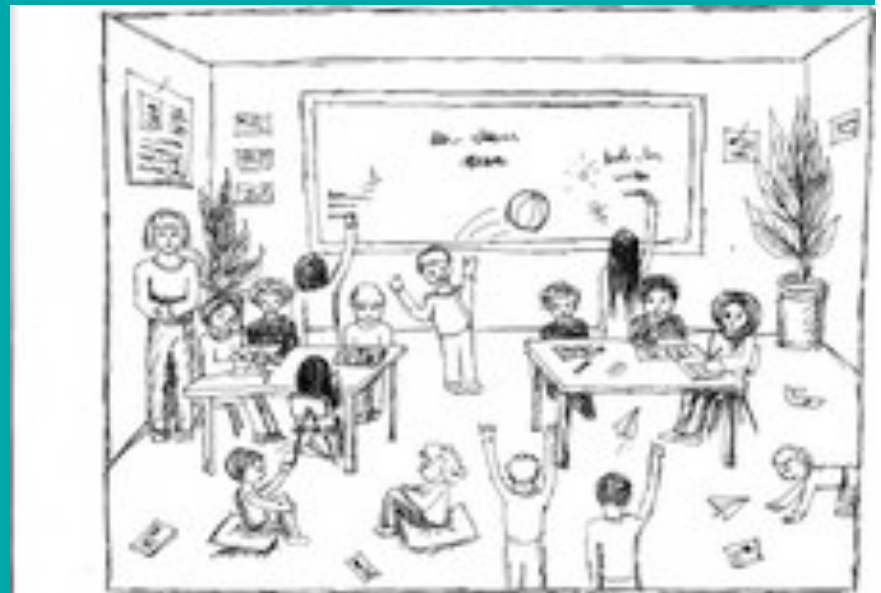
2



3



4



## Preferences for classroom setting

	<b>Pairs</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Circle</b>	<b>Mixed</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Male</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>

## Reasons for preferences

### 1. Pairs

*“Everybody is sitting quiet, so they can learn”*

*“I can understand and repeat what the teacher says”*

*“I can hear what the teacher says”*

*“The teacher writes on the board and I can see”*

*“The teacher tells us what to do”*

### 2. Groups

*“Children can listen to the teacher when she comes to the group”*

*“Teacher speaks with each child”*

*“It’s better for me, I can hear the other children and the teacher”*

*“Children work and can sing together”*

*“I like it because I can listen to songs”*

### 3. Circle

*“Children listen to music and sing along”*

*“In circle you study better”*

*“It’s good to hear the music”*

*“I can see all my friends”*

### 4. Mixed

*“Children are all together and play with the teacher. It’s fun”*

*“Children enjoy the English lesson, there are many things we can use”*

# Teachers' evaluation of Focal Learners

Teacher's '07 \* Teacher's '08 Crosstabulation (.185)

1= low; 2=average; 3=high		TEACHER'S 2008 evaluation			TOTAL
		1	2	3	
TEACHER'S 2007 Evaluation	1	1	6	3	10
	2	0	8	9	17
	3	0	5	15	20
TOTAL		1	21	25	47

# Focal Learners' self perception

Selfperc. 1st Selfperc. 2nd Crosstabulation (= .058)

		Self-perception '08			Total
		1	2	3	
Self-perception '07	1	0	6	3	9
	2	1	5	11	17
	3	0	3	16	19
Total		1	14	30	45

**FL Listening tests results:  
1st 2007 - 2nd2008**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>Pair 1</b>	<b>List.07</b>	<b>11,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3,352</b>	<b>,511</b>
	<b>List.08</b>	<b>13,77</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3,504</b>	<b>,534</b>

	N	Correlation	Sig.
<b>List.07 &amp; List.08</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>,298</b>	<b>,052</b>

# Focal learner 23213 F

## Grade 1

- Teacher's ev. **2**
- Self-perception **2**
- List. Test **9**
- Smiley **2**

### Observed in class

#### 1st year

Sometimes **late** in completing tasks. Participates to games but not consistently. Enjoys singing.

Tends to **lose attention**.

#### 2nd year

More participative. **Intervenes** to ask for repetition. More enthusiastic.

## Grade 2

- Teacher's ev. **2**
- Self-perception **3**
- List. Test **15**

### • *Smiley:*

She likes learning English this year as last year, she finds it easier.

She **doesn't particularly like learning new words**.

- Favourite school subject: **Italian**
- Best likes: spelling games
- Dislikes: nothing
- Finds English as last year: not difficult
- Parents are happy that she's studying English.
- They help her at home with her homework (**words**).
- She prefers studying in classroom 1 (pairs) because **everybody can hear what the teacher says**.

# Focal learner 24107 M

## Grade 1

- Teacher's evaluation: 2
- Self-perception: 1
- Listening Test: 14
- Smiley: 3

## Grade 2

- Teacher's evaluation: 2
- Self-perception: 2
- Listening Test: 4

### Smiley:

He likes learning English this year as last year,  
He finds it organised the same as last year.

**He likes learning new words.**

### Observed in class

#### 1st year

Often late in completing tasks. Participates to games and singing, often **disrupting** the organisation. Easily distracted

#### 2nd year

More **attentive and participative**. Often intervenes with questions.

More enthusiastic when remembers words others don't. Over reactive to teacher.

- Favourite subject: Maths
- In the English lesson he likes drawing and colouring.
- Finds English as last year: not difficult
- **He thinks he is still slower than his mates.**
- Parents happy that he studies English.
- They do not help him with homework.
  
- He prefers **studying in classroom 4 (mixed), because he says children are all together.**

# Conclusions

## Young learners

- Are generally positive towards English language learning as taught in their classes;
- Are aware of what goes on in the classroom and often try to use English;
- Can distinguish between types of activities;
- Can express preferences both in terms of activities, of classroom setting and of teacher behaviour;
- Have a clear perception of their level and of changes in their progress;
- Are aware of what they need in order to learn better;
- Are eager to word their learning experiences and reflective about their preferences;
- Need (and seek for) constant attention and support from teachers.

# Conclusions

## Teachers

- Can reasonably well predict their students' progress;
- Their approach to teaching English to young learners matches approaches currently used to teaching FL to young learners (classroom activities);
- Intervene quite often during lessons to elicit responses from learners who show less attention;
- Often use Italian;
- Do not always pay enough attention to high achievers;
- Their commitment is closely related to the context they teach in (school internal policies).

## Parents

- Are generally very supportive of their children learning English.

## Further research

- Grades 3 and 4
- Learners' self perception when performing tasks.
- Difficulties experienced.
- Interaction among learners and with teacher.
- Classroom settings.
- Exposure at home.
- High achievers.
- Learners' narratives
- Correlation between qualitative and quantitative data (=learners' results)

THANK YOU!

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