



# How many hats do you wear?

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This article provides a broad analysis of the many different hats teachers of young learners wear. How many of the following roles can you identify with: public relations director, cheerleader, choirmaster, literacy coach, assessment specialist, parent educator, storyteller, housekeeping services supervisor, artist in residence, child psychologist, justice of the peace, or diplomat?

本論では、年少者に教える教師が果たすたくさんの異なった役割について幅広く分析する。その役割は、広報部長、チアリーダー、聖歌隊指揮者、読み書き指導員、評価専門家、保護者指導教員、ストーリーテラー、家事サービス監督者、おおかえ芸術家、児童心理学者、治安判事、そして外交官など様々だが、あなたはそのうちいくつ特定できるだろうか。

Several years ago, I was asked to write an introductory piece for teachers of English to young learners on what it meant to provide language instruction to children. I provided a realistic picture of what it entails to deliver instruction to groups of children between the ages of 5 and 11. The person who asked for my advice was a bit miffed at what I came up with since I emphasized the different extensive and often exhaustive roles that a young learners' teacher must assume. Of course, all teachers wear multiple hats and perform various jobs, but, it just seems the teacher of young learners could keep a milliner or haberdasher busy keeping us in hats! Let's take a look at some of them.

## Public relations director

A teacher, assuming the role of public relations director, needs to persuade children to be engaged in learning activities in a language that is new to them and that they don't understand. The public relations director must figure out the best way possible to convince children that an extremely boring worksheet is worth doing and is worth doing well. In this role, it's also necessary to persuade children that there are more benefits to following along with the program than creating chaos and mayhem!

## Cheerleader

The cheerleader must attempt to keep a positive stance and joyful ambience in the classroom. It's important to make sure that the cheerleader isn't overly enthusiastic because that can lead to children being overly excited and a bit on the rambunctious side. It's a very delicate balance between being excited about learning and being on task.

## Choirmaster

Music and singing are an important part of childhood instruction as well as English language instruction. Songs are great for children because they give them an opportunity to practice repeating the same words over and over again in a way that's fun. You don't have to be a talented singer in order to be a choirmaster. Using an audio player is just fine as well as using something like a karaoke machine.

## Literacy coach

Almost always when the teacher walks into a classroom with learners who are 12 years old and above the expectation is that the learners will be able to read.

This is not the case with children who are 11 and below in age since they are usually still in the process of developing reading skills, both in their home language and English. Helping children discover the meaning that print has is often a challenge since not all children learn how to read easily. Children who are having trouble learning to read in their home language may often also have trouble learning how to read in English.

## Assessment specialist

Older learners are usually grouped according to proficiency level, whereas children are grouped according to age and the teacher must assess and deliver instruction for children ranging from beginner all the way through to advanced or

even near native. In some cases the children will be more proficient than the teacher.

### Parent educator

Teachers must often explain the instructional approach and curriculum to the parents. Parents may feel that grammar is the be-all and end-all, or they may believe that playing in English is the best possible approach for their child.

It is up to the teacher to educate the parents regarding the chosen methodology.

### Storyteller

A carpet or rug as a gathering place for story time is a mainstay of both kindergarten classrooms and children's libraries. Teachers and librarians know that a story well read to children either in their home language or a new language can engage a child in many ways. A hallmark of a good story sharing experience is when the children chant "Teacher, please read it again, please!"

### Housekeeping services supervisor

Children are not known for being overly tidy. The English language classroom, like all classrooms serving primary school-age children, can easily look like a birthday party gone amok! The mastery of TPR commands such as "Throw it away" and "Clean up your desk" serve both linguistic and classroom management aims.

### Artist in residence

Cut-and-paste and arts and crafts activities are used to reinforce thematic vocabulary as well as to teach children structural and procedural language. They also help children have fun.

### Child psychologist

When children enter the English language classroom they bring with them their concerns, worries, relationship challenges, etc. They may not have the language skills in any language, let alone English, to express their emotional needs. It is up to the young learner teacher to ascertain and address both articulated and unarticulated problems. For example, it can be daunting to sensitively comfort a child who has no friends without drawing attention to that fact.

### Justice of the peace

One word that doesn't appear on word lists for very young learners is *fair*, even though it is a very common, purposeful, and meaningful word for primary school-age children. The teacher needs to mediate especially when the word *fair* is uttered as part of a complaint. For example, a child may think that it was unfair that another child was line leader two days in a row!

### Diplomat

Addressing the needs of children who are at different levels of language proficiency, emotional development, literacy development, physical development, and cognitive development is challenging enough for educators. But in the case of teaching young learners one also has to address the parents of the children. They are important stakeholders who are generally more motivated than the children themselves for the children to learn English. Joshi doesn't run up to his mom and dad and beg to go to English class. Instead it's the parents' belief that children must learn English, or develop English-language linguistic capital in order to be successful later on in life. This puts enormous pressure on the teacher to diplomatically explain why Joshi hasn't become a fluent English speaker in a matter of months. The teacher must also present evidence as to why Joshi isn't the best at everything in class. It takes a great deal of skill work with parents who bestow so much pressure and hope upon their children and upon their children's teachers.

Well, there you have it. The next time you meet a teacher of young learners, don't be surprised or upset if they do not doff their hat. It's just that they are wearing so many. They don't have time to remove them all!

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