



## **Principal's Message**

**“Good teaching involves a most mysterious feat - sitting, so to speak, on one's listener's shoulder, monitoring what one is saying with the listener's ears, and using this feed back to shape and adapt one's words from moment to moment so that the thread of communication never breaks. This is art, not science” (Swan, 1994)**

I am one of the three hundred seventy five million people in the world who speak English as a second language. My experience with learning this language goes way back to when I was two years of age and I started to listen to music and imitate the sounds I was hearing; I soon realized that they were different from my native language (Romanian). Right then, I fell in love with foreign languages and, at the age of four, I could discriminate between English, French, German, Spanish and I could utter sounds that resembled words in these languages or memorize words without knowing their meanings. The meanings were added later on by watching movies (I was reading the subtitles in Romanian while listening to the original language).

I remember the day in primary two when I asked my grandma if she could speak other languages. She said: “French and Russian”; then, I said: “I will learn many languages and I will become a teacher.” She said to me: “Good luck, I am sure you will do fine”.

And here I am, after thirty-three years. I am a philologist by design: I have studied, analyzed and compared 7 languages of the world and I am still fascinated by them, by the factors and mechanisms that trigger language learning and acquisition.

For the past twenty years **I taught** English in different countries to students of different ages, levels and nationalities, an experience that made me learn new methodologies, programmes, trends and theories. I hope I “will do fine” every time I enter the classroom and I hope I will be able to pass the love for languages to my students.

**I have taught** in different countries students of different levels, nationalities, ages, backgrounds. I have adapted my teaching style, adopting the “in fashion” or “in trend” method of that time: grammar translation in Romania -1990 -1996, more task based - 1998-2000, weak form of CLT / TBLT in China- 2001-2006 and reading and writing PLPR- and PLPR-W programmes in HK-2006- up to present..

**The contexts** in which I taught English **influenced my development of cognitions** about subject- matter by adding new aspects, new knowledge, new programmes, new trends and thus **shaped my beliefs, feelings and understanding** about teaching English.

**Journey Education embeds all my teaching beliefs and stands for my vision of education as a journey, so I invite you to join us for an unforgettable learning journey.**

## Explaining the Journey Curriculum

### Grammar is central...

After all these years of continuing experimenting different teaching methods, I think **grammar is the centre of a language. Grammar is art**, it is necessary to be taught explicitly, even in junior years (like in Romania: L1 grammar starts to be taught in primary 2 and foreign languages are taught through grammar) and it has to be taught linked to communicative tasks or applied to these tasks.

### Focus on pronunciation...

I am also a firm believer in teaching **pronunciation** to students of all ages. Kenworthy (1987) argues that there are many factors that affect pronunciation learning: the native language, age, exposure amount, phonetic ability, attitude and identity, etc. When we, as teachers, designed the curriculum for Journey, we took all these aspects into consideration and thought of the target students' needs.

### Phonics and phonetics

Stahl, S (1992) believes that “**quality phonics instruction should be a part of a reading programme**, integrated and relevant to the reading and writing of actual texts (...)”. That is why at Journey, students will experience shared and guided reading (big books) as well as shared and guided writing. Our team of teachers carefully selected all the texts and phonics that we will teach, drawing from the text during every lesson. In one year we will cover the whole inventory of phonics through songs, chants, rhymes, word-sound games, action phonics, listen and circle, minimal pairs, barrier games, dice/board games, tongue twisters, information gap activities, phonetic/phonemic bingo, onion, change the sound, role-play, show and tell, milling activities, reading aloud, guessing games, etc. using a large range of visual, auditory and kinesthetic aids.

The students will learn about the way sounds are articulated –**phonetics**-, about the relationship between letters and sounds –**phonics**- (they will be able to use orthographic patterns to recognize words); they will become **phonemically aware**, recognizing that the speech stream is a sequence of sounds and **phonologically aware**, that is sensitive to units of sound.

### Sentence stress and intonation

I have to add to our learners' profile the work that we will do on **supra-segmental features**: syllables, stress, intonation and connected speech. Along the years, I became confident that WE CAN, indeed, teach supra-segmental features to our kids, no matter the age. I was surprised to see how fast kids pick up the concepts of syllables, rhythm, intonation; we will do some shadow reading along with beating the rhythm and I am sure that they will like it so much that they will always snap their fingers trying to get the stressed syllables, no matter the text. Before the ending of the first year at Journey we also want to make them aware of connected speech, linking and simplification in spoken discourse.

### Integrated skills

Our classes will also teach **reading and writing in an integrated manner** and will focus on **reading and writing strategies in different text types** by incorporating the use of **different teaching reading and writing strategies**: shared reading and writing, storytelling, guided reading, guided writing as well as independent reading and writing. The lessons in this programme will offer them a fresh perspective on reading and writing, starting with a nice learning environment and aim to equip them with the reading and writing skills necessary for their journey towards becoming independent users of language as well as independent readers and writers. Furthermore, the programme promotes **a blend of genre study and process sequences** and stimulates purposeful spoken and written communication.

During the reading workshops, the students will have a **dynamic relationship with the text**, as they will endeavor to make sense of it. Some of the students will try to construct a personal interpretation; others will try to get the author's original intentions. These two approaches reflect Goodman's (1988, p.12) definition of reading: "the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought."

## Developing Strategic Readers

Students will be provided with a range of reading purposes and will practice different ways of approaching a text (bottom-up and top-down) according to its purpose: reading for general comprehension, reading to search for information, reading to skim, reading to learn, reading to integrate information, reading to write, reading to critique, etc. By **treating reading as a purposeful activity**, we can, as Nuttall (1996, p.3) beautifully expresses: "make teaching more purposeful and classes livelier..." I am confident that at the end of a one- year programme our students will evolve into what Grabe and Stoller (2002, p.80) calls "**strategic readers**" with a high motivation for reading.

Hedge (2000, p.204) established that through **extensive reading** readers can "build their language competence, progress in their reading ability, become independent in their studies, acquire cultural knowledge and develop confidence and motivation to carry on learning; [...] extensive reading encourages critical thinking and positive attitudes towards imaginative experience."

We believe that our **reading workshops**, through their multitude of language rich activities that encompass vocabulary, phonics and grammar in activities that cater to all four skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) constitute a **great strategy** which is the natural path for our students to follow in their process to **reading independence**.

The lessons will offer our students new, clear ways of **how to become better readers**; by the end of the first year they will improve their metalinguistic knowledge (phonemic, morphological and syntactic awareness) and they will learn metacognitive knowledge (understand and use of reading strategies, motivation and background knowledge resources). All these essential reading skills will enable our students to achieve the goals of comprehension, fluency and independence and will build their confidence.

## **Conclusion**

**These are the theoretical reasons why we have chosen to combine the Cambridge textbooks (Fun for Starters, Movers or Flyers, Primary Colours and Story Fun for Starters, Movers or Flyers) with many interactive activities like cooking, drama, planting, movies, storytelling, etc., and with reading workshops. By attending these sessions, students will have the necessary skills for passing their choice of exams but will also have a lot of fun in the process. (By having speaking, reading, writing and listening activities, students will be challenged in all areas and will enhance all four skills).**