



FAQs - Teachers

How long is each Picaro lesson?

60 – 90 minutes, depending on the teacher preferences.

Most lessons have been devised to last around 60 minutes, 90 if the teacher uses the optional activities such as the creative language section, downloadable worksheets or games. There are 3 games in each topic which are integrated into the time scale. The teacher can use any or all of these depending on time and learning restrictions. Picaro lessons can be delivered in one long session or divided into smaller components throughout the week.

How many hours per week is the course?

The course is designed to be run for 1 – 2 hours per week.

Each Unit offers 20 topics per unit of learning, making 80 topics per year. You can teach one topic per week, or two topics per week. Many of the topics within a unit are review topics, ensuring that teachers have an abundance of content to teach.

Picaro has been designed to be flexible so that schools and teachers can use it within the context of their own timetable.

Do teachers have to prepare anything for each lesson?

The Teacher's Book provides over 300 lesson plans that enable teachers to prepare for their English lessons. The Teacher's Book provides annotations for any extra downloadable materials that can be found on the LMS. If the teacher needs any other materials, the Teacher Book notes specify this and alert the teacher.

What is your teaching methodology?

The overriding methodology is that of a communicative approach to learning and teaching. The course is designed to incorporate a combination of guided discovery and social constructivism which focuses on helping and supporting the children in their language learning experience through giving them opportunities to acquire, experiment and progress. The course is also focused on the importance of enjoyment and giving the children opportunities to achieve success which therefore motivates them to experiment in their language learning.

Task-based learning is evident in the philosophy of the tasks they are asked to do which focus on scaffolding their learning into manageable blocks that gradually expand to stimulate their development.

The course methodology also strives to reach each and every child by integrating learning styles to stimulate different learners and provide an opportunity for the children to integrate and participate fully.

This combination of methodology stems from taking a holistic approach to teaching and learning that puts the child first and creates a memorable and carefully structured route towards improving the children's language learning experience.

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The writing of the Picaro course has been developed around five main areas:

- ✔ A communicative approach to language learning
- ✔ Guided discovery and social construct theory
- ✔ Integrating different learning styles
- ✔ Creating challenge to stimulate further learning
- ✔ Appropriate tasks which correspond to the children's' cognitive development through the integration of games and storytelling.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Teaching young learners communicatively means creating a classroom where the focus is on a meaningful context and the children are active in their learning. Teachers who use communicative activity types or tasks provide a learning environment where the children get lots of opportunities to use the language in realistic and natural ways – as children use their own language.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

Piaget suggested that children construct knowledge for themselves (hence Constructivism) by active involvement in processes.

Vygotsky added to this idea by suggesting that learning is enhanced by social interaction, or, in other words the support of a more experienced onlooker such as a parent, teacher or more knowledgeable child (hence Social Constructivism).

Vygotsky suggested the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which means that a child is at a given current knowledge level and there is new knowledge just over the horizon that the child is close to acquiring.

In order to do so he suggests the teacher (in our case as teachers, rather than parents) need to guide the child to an understanding of this new knowledge – 'guided discovery'.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

The implications for the teacher's role here are clear: rather than trying to force feed new language in to children who may not be ready for it, we need to assess where they are in their own learning development and do our best to identify what is next in terms of their ZPD, i.e. what is just over the horizon. Of course this is further complicated in the average class with children at different stages in their individual development.

However playing 'games' and 'story telling' are seen as the ideal way to help children develop as language learners.



LEARNING STYLES AND NEUROLINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

In 1983 Howard Gardner, an American psychologist, published 'Frames of Mind: Theory of Multiple Intelligences'. It discussed the implications of how people learn in different ways. Some people enjoy, and are good at, such things as painting, dancing or playing a musical instrument, others are good at sports, others love cryptic crossword puzzles and others are Sudoku fanatics. We are not all good at the same things.

Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) theory has been with us since 1957 when it was developed in the USA and became popular in the business world as a way for sellers to tune into and influence their buyers. The part of the theory that concerns language teachers is to do with the differing orientations that make us up and appeal to us. These are usually described in three main ways:

- ✔ Visual – we like to see things such as colour and pictures
- ✔ Auditory – we like to hear things such as music
- ✔ Kinaesthetic – we like to touch and feel things such as textures

Some suggest that the senses of smell (olfactory) and taste (gustatory) are even more powerful than the above in making associations and enhancing memory.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

The classroom implications of NLP theory are to include as much that is visual, auditory and kinaesthetic as possible to appeal to the different senses of learners in the hopes that they will find the activities fun, meaningful and memorable.



UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Noam Chomsky suggested the idea of a language acquisition device, a little 'black box' in all our brains that enables us to learn our first language without any 'teaching' as such i.e. no formal grammar or vocabulary classes.

He also suggested the idea of a 'Universal Grammar' (UG) (many claims of which have now been discredited) which suggests children hypothesize about language, testing theories about grammar until they get it right. An often quoted example of this is the use of irregular past verb forms. For example, children usually start saying 'went', probably imitating what they have heard, they then go on to such constructions as 'did go', 'wented' and 'goed' before finally reverting to 'went' when they realise this is the correct form.

Chomsky cites this as evidence of cognitive processing in the child with regard to rules of language use. This processing seems key to learning and is evidenced here by the rejection of the use of 'went' as the correct form initially until other 'rules' had been applied and rejected as wrong.

Age is also a crucial factor here: Piaget suggested the age of seven years old as a cognitive turning point in a child's development (he called this stage the 'concrete operational stage') when the child starts thinking along more adult, logical lines than s/he had previously. He also suggested a further stage starting at about the age of eleven (the 'formal operational stage') when children tend to start thinking in more abstract terms that go beyond the here and now and develop their abilities for logical, deductive reasoning.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

Task should include a step by step approach similar to that of building a house (the foundations, then the structure, then the division of rooms and finally all the items for comfort such as the furniture). The term many experts use called 'scaffolding'; in other words the building blocks which help the learner reach understanding and correspond to their cognitive point in time.

Is the story of Picaro part of the methodology?

Yes, it is. The Picaro storyline is a key element of the methodology of the course because it helps the children have a clear unambiguous context to hold their learning together, where language is used for a purpose; familiarity with a storyline and the same characters to provide a feeling of safety and a stimulating context which engages the children activity in their own learning.

How and why were Picaro topics selected?

The topics are selected based on the children's interests and themes which are relevant to their everyday life. In addition to this, they are based on Cambridge themes so the topics provide a dual-focus – that of maintaining interest in stimulating topics appropriate for the level and age of the children and at the same time preparing them for the Cambridge exams by focusing on the same themes that are integrated into the exam formats.



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How did you select the vocabulary? Is there a list for each topic/level/unit?

The vocabulary featured in Picaro is based on the Cambridge Young Learner test syllabus. We chose to structure the programme around this syllabus because of Cambridge's status as the leader in English language testing. Cambridge focus on real, everyday English and encourage learning in a supportive environment, all of which echo our academic philosophy.

When are reading and writing introduced?

It is natural to learn language by being presented with sounds and words before being asked to read and write them.

Our programme simulates the way children natural learn their first language, by first exposing them to the new language before asking them to read and write in it at later stages.

The alphabet is taught later on in order to allow the children to get more benefit from a logical and gradual focus on phonics. The teaching of sounds rather than letters of the alphabet is seen as a more useful tool to help the children improve and make progress in their speaking or reading skills.

How is the Picaro scope and sequence structured?

The syllabus is based on natural learning and acquisition and each new language area is integrated into a guided discovery task:

- ✔ The language or vocabulary is in a natural context
- ✔ The initial focus is on meaning
- ✔ As the units progress the focus is on creating guided discovery – in other words the children are led towards the language rather than explicitly taught it.
- ✔ The tasks within the syllabus are designed around:
 - ✔ Providing visual, auditory and kinesthetic task types which focus on fun, meaningful and memorable learning
 - ✔ Focusing on social construct theory which guides the children to an understanding of the new language through layered level of progressive difficulty and understanding.
 - ✔ Developing cognitive processing which allows the child to gradually acquire the rules of language use.

Can I alter the order of the syllabus to fit my school curriculum? Will it affect later lessons?

The syllabus is based on a logical progression of language areas and vocabulary however a teacher can select relevant topics or units which would slot into their school curriculum. The course has been designed to allow teachers freedom of movement within the topics so a block of 4 topics could be left out or selected to focus on specific areas as each unit consists of 5 blocks, each containing 3 topic areas and a review topic which consolidates the language and vocabulary from the previous 3 topics.

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Does Picaro have a phonics course?

Picaro focuses on vocabulary and grammar from the Cambridge English: Young Learner curriculum, it is not purely a phonics course. Picaro takes a meaning-based approach to phonics, although we incorporate some of the learning strategies of synthetic phonics.

Letter sounds and blending are integrated into the topics via natural progression and linking into the vocabulary focus of each topic. For example in Unit 3, topic 6 children begin to focus on letter sounds through short vowels such as hat, cat, doll, box then do initial consonants in topic 13 of the same unit.

Phonics is therefore given an explicit focus in the first block of units then expanded in Unit 5 through revision and extension of short vowel sounds and consonants to blending of words and then continues to extend word building every third topic which is dedicated to word building.

Picaro & Phonics:

Starting Out 1 Units 3 & 4

The alphabet both letter names and letter sounds is introduced. Short vowels and some initial consonants are introduced. The focus is on auditory discrimination, that is, the ability to hear the sounds and discriminate them. At this level we only use words from the Cambridge Young Learners Curriculum that have already been introduced so there is a high focus on meaning.

Starting Out 2 Units 5-8

Each unit contains 5 phonics lessons, 4 with new content and one review lesson. Again the focus is on meaning so words from the curriculum are used.

Phonics Lesson Themes:

- ✔ Initial and final consonant sounds
- ✔ Onset and rime (beginnings and endings of words) e.g. in the word 'hat' 'h' is the onset and 'at' is the rime (not rhyme)
- ✔ Simple blending to make CVC words (consonant, vowel, consonant)
- ✔ Recognising sound/spelling patterns e.g. 'ee' or 'ea' 'read, green'

FAQs - Teachers

What is the relationship between Picaro and Cambridge English Language Assessment?

Picaro works closely with Cambridge English to ensure our material closely matches their Young Learner curriculum. We also work hard to make sure our product is of exceptional quality, so that we meet Cambridge English's high standards of English language education. Cambridge are sponsoring the project with their seal of approval. Cambridge only offer this when they are convinced the product is educationally sound and offers constructive, motivating learning to students as well as a professional attitude towards the planning and execution of the product from the organisation concerned.

How long does it take a student to reach the correct level to take Cambridge Starters, Movers and Flyers?

Units 1 – 8 of Picaro are aligned with Cambridge Starters. By the end of Unit 8, we believe that children will be ready to take Cambridge Starters tests. At the end of Unit 12, children could take the movers test, and at the end of Unit 16, students should be prepared for the flyers exams. Cambridge recommends over 200 hours of study before taking their exams, and we offer over 300 hours of preparation.

How does Picaro prepare learners for the Cambridge English: Young Learner tests?

At the higher units in Picaro, up to 70% of the online game content reflects Cambridge English: Young Learner questions.

Preparation of the Cambridge exams is integrated throughout the units through:

- ✔ Working with key vocabulary and language areas within the syllabus which is based on the Cambridge vocabulary and grammar lists in preparation for the exams.
- ✔ Task types which reflect the same kind of tasks the children are asked to complete in the exams.
- ✔ A step by step guide and focused approach on exam preparation in the Teacher's Book to help the teacher combine motivating language learning with exam preparation

My school doesn't use Cambridge English tests. Why would I use your product?

Cambridge YLE is not just a set of exams, it is a curriculum. The Cambridge curriculum is mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). After successfully completing the Picaro course, children will have reached level A2: being able to communicate in everyday language. Cambridge English exams use materials and situations from everyday life in English-speaking countries. For example, the Listening tests use native speakers from countries including the UK, Australia, the USA and Canada.

Cambridge English tests require students to be able to speak English, but you don't have a speaking assessment. How does Picaro develop and measure speaking skills?

Explicit speaking tasks are gradually integrated in the units as the course progresses which mirror the tasks asked of the children in the speaking part of the Cambridge exam - opportunities for pair, group and open class talk are present in each topic and there is a section in the Teacher's Book which focuses on creative use of language or language extension where the children are challenged to 'play with the language'.



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Picaro's online games are geared to providing receptive input through the understanding of instructions to play the game (relevant for exam purposes in the speaking part) and providing further practice of vocabulary and language areas which help the children become more confident and adventurous in their language therefore giving them a wider repertoire of communicative language strategies

How does Picaro monitor student progress?

Picaro provides continual assessment of children's progress using the Online Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS shows student accuracy and also which topics have been completed. As each topic is related to learning outcomes, this helps measure children's learning progress. For example, a teacher or a parent can look on the LMS and check their on the children's progress and get a summative assessment which is aimed at determining the child's achievement level, which also helps on a formative level of assessment by identifying the learning needs of the child.

Towards the end of each unit, the tasks within the online course also strongly reflect Cambridge YLE questions, preparing children for the Cambridge YLE Exams.

Do you have any formal formative assessment? Is there any summative assessment?

Yes, there is a review section at the end of each unit covering vocabulary and language structures which the children need to do to go to the next level.

Have you measured the success of Picaro?

We are currently trailing Picaro around the world. We've already found several instances where Picaro has taught children new vocabulary before it is even covered in a classroom, simply because of the content they are exposed to in the online game. Comprehensive case studies will shortly be developed.



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Picaro's Online Learning Management System (LMS) allows teachers and parents to track student progress, tailor a learning pathway and download extra learning resources.

Reporting

Picaro's Online Learning Management System reports on student progress. Teachers can view how well students have performed on every topic in the detailed student scorecard.

Teachers can view:

- ✔ Number of stars collected out of possible stars
- ✔ Overall accuracy
- ✔ Time spent on the topic
- ✔ Number of attempts at the topic
- ✔ Latest attempt at the topic

Access Control

Within the LMS, teachers can choose to lock and unlock Units, according to their students' level of English. Depending on the flow of the local curriculum or of any topics-based learning, teachers can also choose to lock and unlock particular topics, so that all students play the same topics in any given time. For example, around Mothers' Day, teachers could choose to only have topics about 'Family' available

Ranking

Teachers can view a rank of how each child in the class is performing compared with others. They can also compare their own class average with other classes in the school undertaking the same level of study. Rankings are calculated based on student and whole-class accuracy.

Downloadable Resources

There are numerous resources available on the LMS to extend student learning.

Worksheets: For each topic covered (20 per Unit) there is an extra worksheet available to download from the LMS. These worksheets complement the materials covered in the student activity book and the online game. They provide extra work for early finishers and help reinforce learning.

Make-It Activities: In each Activity book there are references to 'Make-It' activities: extended craft projects that reinforce vocabulary topics. The templates for these can be found on the LMS and the downloaded, printed and distributed for the class to use.

Flashcards: Using Flashcards is an excellent way to help children remember new vocabulary. Each Unit comes with a set of Flashcards that teachers can download, print and laminate and use repeatedly in class.

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Songs & Videos: For each unit, we feature a specially-created Picaro song that ties into the curriculum so that children can sing-along and practise.

Can children play Picaro at home?

Yes, students will be able to play Picaro at home as well as at school..

Can children compete with each other in the game?

Currently, children cannot compete with each other in the game, in order to prevent weaker students from getting discouraged in the early stages of language learning. However, teachers are able to see the top scorers in the class via the LMS, so could produce a leaderboard in class if they felt it was a motivational activity.

Will the characters and activities evolve to match the ages of the students?

The game will evolve as the levels increase. From each Unit, the game world changes in order to keep students engaged. New worlds such as underwater world and Stone Age world are introduced. The game mechanics also increase in complexity. As the levels increase, the characters grow up in the same way that children playing the game will.

My school uses American English. Can I use your product?

Currently, our programme teaches British English. If your students are sitting the Cambridge Young Learners' Exams, Cambridge accept American English or British English, as long as your students are consistent.

Creating an American English version of Picaro is on the roadmap for the future.