In the last 15 years, the teaching of English as an additional language to young learners (hereafter referred to as TEYL) has expanded rapidly with huge numbers of younger and younger children worldwide receiving formal English language instruction. Not so long ago, TEYL was mainly concentrated on children between 9 to about 13 years of age. But today, the term “young learner” is widely applied to describe children learning English from the age of 3 all the way up to 14 years of age (Pinter, 2006).

Naturally, as TEYL continues to grow, the numbers of teachers working with young learners is also growing, particularly where English is taught as a foreign language. In our experience, homeroom teachers, teachers making the shift from secondary to primary teaching, and those starting their careers as young learner English language educators are quick to recognise that while teaching English to young learners can be a rewarding experience, it can also feel like a daunting task.

The purpose of this book is to introduce some guiding principles for TEYL and to show how these can be used to help teachers develop classroom practices that are both enjoyable and beneficial for the groups of young learners they work with. Our focus will be on working with young learners from first grade to Grade 6 (or children from 5–12 years of age) as this is the area of TEYL that has seen most rapid expansion in recent years. However, the principled reflective approach to TEYL we introduce here can also be adopted in the teaching of preschool children and older young learners in the lower reaches of secondary schooling.
In Chapter 2, we will consider insights from a number of key theoretical perspectives regarding children’s language learning and the role of teachers in supporting this, which can help lay the foundations for effective TEYL practice. In the next three chapters, we will consider the ways in which these principles can be activated in classroom teaching.

In Chapter 3, we introduce task-based learning as a classroom approach that is ideally suited to helping young learners develop their knowledge and skills in English. Chapter 4 considers how we can implement task-based learning in the classroom and provide examples of the different sorts of tasks and activities that we can use to help learners develop fluency and accuracy in the target language. In Chapter 5, we turn to the importance of literacy development with young learners and investigate some tasks and activities that could help develop good reading and writing skills.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we discuss the role of reflective teaching in ensuring a good fit between the ideas we introduce in this book and teachers’ own learners and teaching settings.