



The Music of Language – eBook 6

The Evolution of Programmes and Franchises

Helen Doron English is not just a single programme, but an integrated series of courses that are designed to complement each other and support the needs of children as they grow. But all of these programmes, from Baby's Best Start for children ages 3 months to 2 years old, all the way through the intensive Teen English programmes for children up to 19 years old, evolved from the original idea. Those early classes with a handful of children evolved into what is now Fun with Flupe and Jump with Joey.

Over the years, we added more formalised course material, and the programme sets increased. We introduced Play On in English, quickly followed by Botty the Robot. This was a delightful (though challenging) foray into multimedia, and the children responded enthusiastically to the sheer fun of it. This was our gateway to material for older children, and it led us to the Paul Ward series (Paul Ward's World and Paul Ward and the Treasure), and the Teen English series which addressed the needs of the 8 to 14+ age range.

At that age, we were adding the element of reading. The children in these courses had already graduated through the earlier infant levels, and had mastered a comfortable level of verbal skills. To supplement the reading classes, we added additional reading workbooks.

The programmes continue to grow and I remain involved in creating new material. I adore the whole creative process.

We expanded early education offerings with MathRiders in 2002 and Ready Steady Move! in 2006. MathRiders was a direct response to witnessing what can only be described as 'maths phobia' in local school children. Ready Steady Move! is a movement programme that also uses songs and rhymes in the mother tongue or a foreign language.

While our programmes were growing, I was beginning to look at ways to provide access to more children. To that end, franchising the programme was the logical solution. I began in 1997 by franchising areas here in Israel. The biggest learning curve for me was identifying what made a successful franchise holder. That I had to learn through (sometimes painful!) experience. Over time, I came to understand that a terrific teacher is not necessarily going to be a successful franchise holder. There were a number of almost intangible factors, from personality, motivation and expectations. As I became better at recognising these factors, I became better at screening applicants. This significantly improved the success rate of my franchise holders, because I could weed out individuals who were not ready for the challenge.

In 1995, we had found agents to promote and use our methodology and materials in Austria and then Germany, and formally began franchising there in 1998. Today, we have franchises in over 30 countries, from Ecuador to the Ukraine.





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All told, there are over 100 Master Franchise areas, 1002 Learning Centre franchises, over 4000 teachers and this year about 350,000 students worldwide.

The Road Ahead

It is early evening and the sun is touching the hills across the wadi, painting my office with a blaze of red light. The air is fragrant with the scent of wild sage and oregano. I hear a few late employees tidying up their desks, patting the dogs and exchanging good-byes as they head out. I look around my office in this lovely building, perched on this exquisite hill in Israel's Western Galilee, and I think about the journey that has brought me here. It has been an adventure, these twenty-five years. I get up to stretch and adjust the shades against the glare of the setting sun. Polly groans, scratches her ear, and slowly rises. She looks at me and wags her tail, as to say, "Life is good". She contentedly heads out of my office in quest of a biscuit or some forgotten leftovers.

The wall opposite my desk features a large bookcase, its bulging shelves attesting to our prolific production of Helen Doron English workbooks, training guides, and other material. Next to the bookcase is a large wall map adorned with coloured pins marking franchises and learning centres across the world. Around the walls, there are pictures here and there of my family, of me with staff members and franchise holders, of meetings with government officials and speaking at conferences. There is a photo of me dressed as the great-grandmother from the film "Botty the Robot Teaches You English", hugging a ten-year-old Ella.

It is true that I saw this potential over twenty-five years ago. I could close my eyes and imagine successful franchises, classes of happy children, and a warm and friendly building that felt like home. But that is not to say that there have not been surprises.

I had not envisioned the full-scale production of our materials as they exist today (a far cry from the crude cut-and-paste attempts in that first year). And certainly nothing prepared me for the startling way in which the Helen Doron English methodology has affected the adults involved. I continue to be surprised, heartened, touched and moved.

Teachers and franchisees report that it has transformed their lives; learning to use positive reinforcement has a ripple effect on other aspects of their home relationships. Watching their children shine is a more powerful statement than any self-help book!

A master franchise holder told me that she has started to see her family in a different light, and how their interaction has become far more positive. "I shifted from criticising and finding fault to reinforcing the good things, so they spend more time focusing on the good things". That which gets attention and energy, grows. Input equals output.

Pedro Leite, a teacher in Portugal, wrote this moving prose:

It's Monday... the props are ready... the CD is playing in the background... and they start coming in! Babies, children, older ones... they are happy but the question is, what are they expecting?





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Parents expect to see a teacher teaching English for 45 minutes. The children see no teacher. The children see no classroom. Most of them do not know what 45 minutes are.

They only see a friend. They see someone who is their equal. They see a space where they can have fun, where they can play and where they are always praised, and a place and a person who does not care if they can colour properly or not.

And then they say “I am...!” They say “car, bus, truck”. They learn that the world is made of shapes. Parents look... not believing how much the children have improved. And then we wave bye-bye to a doggy. We touch the ground and reach up high.

The lesson is over and they feel happy. They leave singing. Forty-five minutes of perfection. No worries, no stress, just eight little children and a grown-up child playing together in English.

I knew that this was the right way, that this methodology would work. Parents enrol their children based on facts and figures, but they come to truly believe by seeing for themselves. It is a wondrous and transforming experience to watch them be transformed.

I am not sure where this road will ultimately take me, but hope that I can continue to plant green trees along the way.

