LB: A very warm welcome to Marin Bastkowski. Mr Bastkowski is a teacher and a lecturer at University of Hildesheim and has lots of experience in the teaching of English. Mr Bastkowski is one of the few people who has studied all of the school types there are in Germany. Let’s start the interview with the first question.

Mr Bastkowski, here in Bavaria, English is taught from grade three onwards and learners only receive two English lessons per week. As we cannot change the syllabus, would you argue that the available time we have is sufficient to develop basic competences in well planned classes or should we start using English outside of the regular timetable in normal daily routines?

MB: You know, on the one hand, I would say yes, it is definitely enough because in my point of view, the primary school teachers they actually doing a great job. In my point of view. And motivating all the learners for, and that's something we have to keep in mind, a completely new subject. And I think you're aware of that as well, that there was a Bavarian study among primary school learners and 95% said that they love English and isn't that great result. I think that's wonderful. But on the other hand, of course, I would say it's always great to give English a more relevant role or status, for example by adding more lessons. But you know, being a teacher, I have to be realistic, and it's not going to happen that English is getting more lessons. So, that's why kind of short skill modules can be included if the teachers got the qualifications. PE music, geography, for example and so on. But we have to realistic, and in my point of view, given the fact that all the teachers, primary school teachers, do such a fantastic job, I go with the lessons we have at the moment. And I'm happy with that.

LB: English as a lingua franca and a means of global communication plays a key role in our globalised world. In Germany, it is introduced in primary schools. Here in Bavaria, English is introduced in the third grade. However, in Bavaria, English is not graded in primary school education and therefore, it is not relevant for the transition to secondary school. What is your view on this? Do you agree with this system, or would you change it, if you could?

MB: First of all, I would say that although English is not graded in primary school, I think it's sort of very relevant and important subject, and it will play a very important role later on. So, you know, you have to keep in mind that in year five, of course, that would turn into one of the major subjects at secondary school, and that's, of course, very relevant and very important. But you know, you mentioned the grading system, so that's something that, you know, is established in the 60s. And we still use kind of this old-fashioned grading system, one to six. Something we always have to keep in mind. And also, there is kind of so many different mindsets when it comes to assessment and grading. I just asked my 34 colleagues. It's from extreme to very low. We get the whole range when it comes to assessment and grading. That will always happen among teachers. That's the way it is, I would say. But in my perspective, because it was the question, actually is that primary school education should mainly focus on motivating and make learners eager to learn the foreign language. And therefore, I think the focus on feedback texts and not on the grades, but on giving feedback, as you mentioned as well, to get a monthly feedback, I think that should be the main focus and not grades one to six. Really give a personal feedback and to motivate your learners to give them a positive feeling about what they're doing. Especially because it's a new subject. So that's why greats aside, and really focus on the personal feedback. That’s something learners will keep in mind.

LB: In primary schools writing plays a minor role. In secondary schools, though, great emphasis is put on writing. Do you think that writing should play a greater role in primary schools to bridge the gap between the two school types?

MB: We discussed it last time as well because the writing is really challenging. I think there are different aspects we have to look at. Because firstly, for example, some of the learners actually want to write. So, we have to keep in mind that there are really learners who want to write, who like doing that. And secondly, we also have to consider the fact that, for example, writing is already kind of placed in everyday surrounding, and the world somehow. Because look at commercials, music, movies. So, there's writing all around our learners at the moment. And for me thirdly, I would say that there is no great emphasis on writing in a secondary school, but just definitely a stronger focus on that. But it's not the main emphasis. That's something we have to bear in mind because the emphasis is still speaking and listening. And writing, as you know, is just one of many skills. And that's why I think on a primary school level, we should slowly start with the process of establishing writing. For example, we let learners copy some texts, sentence starters, or writing down instructed texts, and so on. So, step by step. But it's not the main emphasis, and not the main focus. So, I'm in favour of some so called semi-creative writing activities because, for example, starting with sentence starters, or reconstructing dialogues for example, or like a dictation race - these activities the learners can accomplish and what they get is a positive feeling towards writing, and that's important. That writing does not stick as something like ‘Oh God have to write. I don't want to do that!’. But it's something motivational, and positive, and that's important. That's why also fluency is way more important than accuracy at the beginning when it comes to the writing process. In my point of view. As I said, different mindsets, but in my point of view.

LB: The ‘Evening-Studie’ (EValuation ENGlisch IN der Grundschule, 2009) ascertained amongst other things that learning strategies are not supported sufficiently to ensure successful transitions to secondary schools. Do you think the problem is that teachers underestimate the importance of learning strategies? If so, how can this be changed?

MB: As Theresa showed, one of the publications was on learning strategies. And then I came across Professor Oxford, and she said that they are 33 different versions of definitions of the term ‘learning strategies’. So, the question whether to underestimate that is very difficult to answer because first of all, we have to kind of define what learning strategies are, and also the difference between techniques or skills. And so, sometimes it's very tough to distinguish between all the three things as well. So, my point of view, however, learning strategies they do belong to the most important tools in language teaching. So, just look at meta learning strategies where learners reflect upon their own performance. Memorising techniques for lexical chunks and phrases. Communication strategies. So, I do think yes, learning strategies they should play a very important role in language teaching as well. But I definitely do not think that teachers underestimate the importance of learning strategies, because you know, just look at the primary school teachers and what they do. I just listed a couple of things for me as well, like the picture and word cards, songs movement, the learning posters, rituals, games. So, there are really so many different elements that contribute to a very successful use of learning strategies. And that's why I think it's not being underestimated. What my goal actually is, is to make the learners aware. That they are more aware of how to use learning strategies. So, what does it mean? If you, say listening for gist, or use your pre-knowledge, or intelligent guessing, what does it mean? So, I want them to understand, that they are able to use learning strategies more on their own, and this is something actually I want to encourage all the primary school teachers and secondary school teachers to do. To help our learners to use learning strategies. And I think that should be the goal.

LB: Which aspects do you see changing over the next few years when it comes to teaching the English language at primary schools? On that note, what changes are long overdue and need to be addressed?

MB: So, for me there are two main changes. The first one is a stronger focus on topics in the field of global goals. And the second one, obviously, is the whole digital world. So, just the first one with the global goals. I think we're all aware of the fact that the world is changing. We just look at the Earth Overshoot Day, Fridays for Future, worldwide issues and so on. And I do think we should address these topics and issues as well in our classroom. Of course, in a very limited way, but still, they provide so many great topics and things to talk about. And I think, again, it's important that our learners are aware of some situations, of some issues and we have to deal with that. So, just in case you're not aware of the global goals. The UN actually established 17 global golds in 2015. For example, quality education, or a reduced inequality, gender equality and so on. And they should be achieved by, or actually till 2030 and it's great to use some of these topics in our classroom as well. For example, why not talking or why not focusing on aspects like how to reduce plastic use, or food waste? Or simple ways like my way to school - just to have a look at ‘This is my way to school’. I'm looking at children from other countries as well, and how do they go to school? What are the differences. For example, they need three hours to get to school. You only need three minutes. So, these are kind of small things, but we make our learners aware of the worldwide situation, global goals, and I think that's very nice. And the second thing, as I said, of course, is the digital world. That's something we all have to keep in mind. Now there is kind of a lot of publication, also at primary school level. They focus on how to involve digital tools as well. Think about flipped classroom, explainer clips, podcasts and so on. So, I think there's a great range of activities you can actually do in your class. And learners and teachers now, they have to move a step forward to accept that and slowly get into the direction as well. So, these are the two changes in my point of view.

LB: We are going to be future teachers of English at primary schools. What tips and tricks can you give us from your field of study?

MB: Knowing the interview questions, I actually prepared something now, and so I'm going to share my screen again. I think you need to visualise that. I like to give three different tips. The first one is the activity book, the second one is all about task constructions, and the last one is all about the four B’s.

So, when I plan a lesson when I teach, I actually noticed many, many years ago that I kept for getting some of the great activities or ideas I had in mind. So, and then I forgot okay, where do I have to look it up? Wasn't that book on this book? And so on. So, what I did is, I created my own activity book where listed, all the warmups, introduction or lead ins, main methods, feedback and so on, activities I did in my class. And step by step, I added more and more activities, as you see now, I'm actually able to use more than 40 different warmups in my class if I want to. So, step by step I kind of created my own activity book with my methods, with the activities I like to use. And that's something I would recommend to you as well, so that, you know, you come across so many great ideas and thoughts. Just, you know, take notes, write them down, create your own activity book, and with the help of the activity book you can plan your lessons way quicker, and of course, you have again balanced teaching, variation of all these different activities and ideas. That was kind of my first tip. Of course, you can do the same for pictures, reading songs and so on. I just listed a couple of ideas.

The second one for me is that task construction. Also, if I observe the students, for example within different lessons, what I notice is, also as many teachers do, that they all start saying okay ‘Now you're going to work in groups’, and what's the first thing the learners do, is like you, is trying to arrange kind of the group work. But that's not the focus. The focus is actually on what they're supposed to do. And that's why whenever you teach, keep in mind that you can use a so called four step structure and that's this one. So, the first thing you could do is to focus on the content. So, what are your learners or students supposed to do and why? As you can see, it's all about communication. What is the goal? That they understand the purpose. Why do I have to do this? Followed by the material. Therefore, you're going to need or going to work with the worksheet, or with the course book, or therefore we are going to listen to his song. So, afterwards you kind of present the material. Then you focus on the time and remember do not present the length. So do not say ‘Okay. You have 10 minutes!’ because your learners have no idea when 10 minutes started but focus on the deadline. ‘You have time like 10 past 10’, and so on. So that's important. Give the deadline. And the last one is all about social form. Then the moment has come. You allowed to say it is a group work, pair work and so on, because then you can arrange those kinds of groups. So, step by step you actually make it very transparent for your learners what to expect. They always know that they get all the information needed to successfully accomplish the task. So, really from content, to material, to time, to social form. That’s number two.

This is also within number that I always write down the topic of my lesson, and also the different steps. And below the topic of the lesson, I always add heads up, heads down or heads together. I do that because I want them that they realise ‘Okay, this is going to happen in today's lesson’.

So, ‘heads up’ means it's going to be a focus on for example presentations where we’re going to watch a short movie sequence, and so on. So, my head is up. I'm looking to the front.

‘Heads down’ means that they know ‘Okay, today I'm actually going to work individually’. For example, I have to write something on my own, read something, do something on my own, do some exercises in the book, and so on.

‘Heads together’ means that there know ‘Okay, today's focus in the lesson is that you going to work together in a team or in a group’. And I always add that below the headline and by doing so, I provide, hopefully, a great deal of transparency to my learners.

So, and the last thing is all about the four B’s.

What I noticed, especially when I was still a primary school teacher, is that the learners approached me every single moment for questions that, you know, could have been solved on their own as well. So, that's why I established the **four B’s**, and it was hanging around in the primary school classroom as well. That means if my learners have a question or something, or they didn't understand anything, the first thing they have to do, is use your **brain**, because I want them to really think about it. ‘Don't just approach me right away, think about’.

The second B is **‘book’**. So, maybe if there's something, you can read it up. Maybe it's in the front, on the back, or you just got in your folder. Just check your material, check your book.

If this one doesn't help, then you can ask a **buddy**. So, maybe somebody is sitting next to you, and so on.

And only then if this still doesn't work then you can ask me and I'm the **boss**, so that's the last B. So, four different B’s, and that's a great system as well. So, these are kind of the three ideas I had in mind for you.