



*Making models at  
the Lower Primary*

Learning a foreign language becomes easy when it is needed to express one's interests and needs. A six year old boy, who joined the school last year without a word of English, is a regular at the model-making table at the Lower Primary. Over the past several weeks, he has concentrated his efforts on making models of robot transformers-robots that fold themselves up into trucks, jet planes and cars. Each robot is made of different parts which are cut, folded, glued and then assembled together. The various parts of the robots are kept in large folders with the names of the body parts printed on large labels. The children become accustomed to searching through the folders for the parts they need.

This little boy has learned to communicate what he wants in simple English sentences. His requests have evolved from "You me make it" to "Please cut it for me" or "You fold it, I glue it." The exchanges even give rise to puns such as "Where is my head?" "Did it fall under the table?" "No, it is on your shoulders." Recently, glancing at the model of the day, a Formula One car, he commented, "Well, we don't need any chests, torsos or upper legs for this one!"

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One of the academic aims of the school is that the children develop creativity and critical thinking skills, in addition to subject knowledge. A free and relaxed environment helps to promote this. The sixth standard children were starting to learn about fractions, and the teacher was explaining about numerators and denominators and proper and improper fractions. One boy was listening to the explanation but carrying on, at the same time, a joking conversation about cartoons with the teacher next to him. "You can do anything in a cartoon!" he was saying. "It's so easy! If you want a house, you just draw a house. If you need money, you just draw money! If you want a milkshake, shazam! You have a milkshake."

He thought a minute, then added the down side: "Of course, someone might erase you! You might have to live inside a newspaper!" Another teacher nearby, perhaps to test his attentiveness to the fractions, called over to him and asked, "If we were a fraction and you were the denominator and I was the numerator on your shoulders, what do you think would happen?" Without missing a beat, he answered, "That'd be improper and we'd fall down."