

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Learning English is vital skill that will help children achieve their full potential in later life. If they have the right techniques, they can learn English quickly and effectively. So, it is important that they have to learn English which is practical and useful. Learning should not be stressful for children. It should be fun and stimulating. Their studies should make reading, listening, and speaking in English come naturally. As their confidence develops, they will learn more and use English to a more challenging level. This paper discusses about some resources for EFL teachers to facilitate the children in learning a foreign language. These are purposed for them to be able to teach effectively with the fun and variety that children need. The last part, this paper tells about how to ensure the children learn English using simple techniques that will absolutely make the teachers' job more fun and satisfying. Also, it will be expected that the teachers will have enough fresh ideas to be the most inspiring teachers that they possibly can.

Keywords: Teaching English, Young Learners.

INTRODUCTION

Children are unique social beings with their own culture-ways of doing things. Caponegro (2007) states that we have a responsibility to ensure the best possible world for children and to provide them with many opportunities to experience their cultures fully, encouraging them, as they move forward, to one day work to reimagine the world that will be theirs. We also, however, have a responsibility to ourselves to ensure that we never stop being energized by the creative spirit of the young and by the many essential qualities and the works that we generally associate with them. It is also supported by Vygotsky's viewpoint that the child is as *social*. Learning to do things and learning to think are both helped by interacting with an adult. Vygotsky saw the child as first doing things in a social context, with other people and language helping in various ways, and gradually shifting away from reliance on others to independent action and thinking (Cameron, 2003).

Furthermore, children are *children - not little adults*. If we view our children as less important than ourselves, we will tend to put our needs and desires above theirs, perhaps even attempting to justify our selfishness by claiming. It is really an effort to teach our children that none of them are the most important person in the world (Prewett, 1996). Also, as cited in Cameron (2003) that Piaget has a viewpoint that the child is an *active learner*. Piaget's concern is with how young children function in the world that surrounds them, and how this influences their mental development. The child is seen as continually interacting with the world around him/her, solving problems that are presented by the environment. It is through taking action to solve problems that learning occurs. Then, children also seek out intentions and purposes in what they see other people doing, bringing their knowledge and experience to their attempts to make sense of other people's actions and language. Realizing that children are active 'sense-makers', but that their sense-making is limited by their experience. Next, it is now known that young children are competent, active agents of their own conceptual development. In short, the mind of the young child has come to life (Bruner, 1972, 1981a&b; Carey & Gelman, 1991; Gardner, 1991; Gelman & Brown, 1986; Wellman & Gelman, 1992 as cited in Bransford & Brown, 1999).

From those theories above, it can be concluded that there is an emphasis on considering children as active learners who are able to set goals, plan, and revise. Children are seen as learners who assemble and organize material. As such, cognitive development involves the acquisition of organized knowledge structures including, for example, biological concepts, early number sense, and early understanding of basic physics. In addition, cognitive development involves the gradual acquisition of strategies for remembering, understanding, and solving problems. Also, the children actively try to make sense. For instance, to find and construct a meaning and purpose for what adults say to them and ask them to do. They can only make sense in terms of their world knowledge, which is limited and partial. Therefore, the teachers need to examine classroom activities from the child's point of view in order to assess whether pupils will understand what to do or will be to make sense of new language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bransford & Brown (1999) stated that children differ from adult learners in many ways in learning a foreign language. It is also stated by Cameron (2003:1) that there are some obvious differences: children are often more enthusiastic and lively as learners. They want to please the teacher rather than their peer group. They will have a go at an activity even when they don't quite understand why or how. However, they also lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves motivated on tasks they find difficult. Furthermore, they don't have the same access as older learners to metalanguage that the teachers can use to explain about grammar and discourse. The children often seem less embarrassed than adults at talking in a new language, and their lack of inhibition seems to help them get a more native-like accent.

Children's direct experiences and interactions with the things and people around them are central to their learning. It is important that settings make the activities that they present as meaningful as possible. Practitioners make a huge contribution to children's active learning by creating the climate and conditions that best promote children's involvement. First, this involves building children's self-esteem and confidence. Mental and physical involvement in learning is built on the confidence and trust that come from good relationships. When children are unsure of their surroundings they lack confidence and are tentative in their actions. When they trust that they are valued and accepted for who they are, they are sure of themselves. This enables them to seize opportunities to interact with people they know well, investigate the objects and spaces around them, be stimulated by challenges, take risks and tackle problems with enthusiasm. Fisher & Terry (1977:84-85) explain that children can participate in a variety of sorting activities as part of their everyday learning. For instance, a group of students went on a neighborhood walk and collected a number of interesting items. These were sorted, labeled, and attractively displayed. One group of four children sorted their collections of leaves by placing the green leaves in one pile, the brown leaves in another, and the reddish colored leaves in still another. They then selected representative leaves from each of the three piles, attached them to a large piece of poster board, and wrote brief descriptions to identify each of the categories.

Children learn from hands-on, physical activities.

Physical activities are to develop as a child at play learns to walk, run, climb, jump, throw, catch. It is very important that the fine motor skills develop for a child to be able to hold a pencil and write, very important in kindergarten and preschool years. That is why many children at these ages are playing small things in the classroom setting. Promote active learning by planning play experiences that are based on children's real life experiences, such as a hospital or a building site. Be flexible and help to sustain children's endeavors by adjusting plans and routines, for example, by allowing children to return to an activity later.

Children's thinking is embedded in a here-and-now context of situation.

Welton & Mallan (1981:116) state that their observations indicate that when most children enter elementary school they have a secure conception of "yesterday". Something that happened to them two weeks ago, however, took place "a long time ago". This does not necessarily mean they have forgotten what happened to them. Children can often describe events-vacations, experiences, etc. in amazing detail. They can tell us *what* happened, but typically cannot provide an accurate time frame for *when* the events took place. Furthermore, in many respects, the way in which children develop a conception of the future is similar to how they develop notions of the past. So, children's thinking is embedded in a hear-and-now context of situation.

Children learn holistically-from whole to part.

Whiting (2000) gives an example such as, after the text is read, the teacher writes a sound blend from the text on the board, and asks the pupils to search for the sound blend in the text. As they find occurrences, the words are written on the board. Other words are suggested. The list is read aloud.

Children learn by acquisition-implicitly.

Saffran, Senghas, and Trueswell explain that discovering the words of a language, and what they mean in the world, is only the first step for the language learner. Children must also discover how the distribution of these elements, including grammatical endings (*-s, -ed, -ing*) and function words (*of, to, the*) convey the further combinatorial meaning of an utterance. That is, children must implicitly discover and use the grammar of their language to determine who-did-what-to-

whom in each sentence. This applies even for simple sentences like *Mommy gave Daddy the milk* as opposed to *Daddy gave Mommy the milk*. The parsing process is therefore an essential component of the language comprehension device, because it allows children to assemble strings of elements in such a way as to compute crucial, and even novel, relational conceptions of the world.

Children have relatively short attention span.

Schmitt (1999) describes that a normal attention span is three to five minutes per year of a child's age. Therefore, a 2-year-old should be able to concentrate on a particular task for at least six minutes, and a child entering kindergarten should be able to concentrate for at least 15 minutes. (Note: A child's attention span while watching TV is not an accurate measure of his or her attention span).

Hence, the children's foreign language learning depends on what they experience. The language experience that is provided for children, the more they are likely to learn. Foreign language lessons should provide all or most of a child's experience of the language in use. The teachers need to ensure they have experiences in lessons that will build those skills if they want children to develop certain language skills.

DISCUSSION

Techniques consist of the things the teachers do in the classroom, but there are only few techniques that do not in some manner involve the use of materials to support and enhance them. The teachers could have short conversation, role plays, blackboard work, pictures, realia, and so on, but much of the richness of language instruction is derived from supporting good learning materials for children.

Brown (1994: 93) explains that children are focused on what this new language can actually be used for right here and now. Language needs to be firmly **context embedded**. Story lines, familiar situations and characters, real-life conversation, meaningful purposes in using language. Context reduced language in abstract, isolated, unconnected sentences will be much less readily tolerated by children's minds. Now, these are resources for EFL teachers to facilitate children in learning

a foreign language. These are purposed for them to be able to teach effectively with the fun and variety that children need. They are as follows:

- Stories entertain children, educate children and give children their cultural ability (Musthafa:9). Besides that, Cameron (2003:163) says that children will pick up words that they enjoy and, in this way, stories offer space for growth in vocabulary. Moreover, Parreren (1982 &1992 as cited in Cameron, 2003:164) suggests that letting children choose the stories they want to hear may help maximize the learning that takes place.
- Access a lot of preschool activities and games. There are more one hundred games which include several hundred ideas to teach English to children in fun ways.
- Games make learning fun so the class and children are willing participants and not just there because they have to be.
- Choose from listening and comprehension games and reinforce with communicative speaking games.
- Make use of hundreds of ideas for vocabulary acquisition and revision.
- Remember that repetition is the mother of skill. These activities incorporate repetition as part of the natural learning process.
- Many games and activities include movement, so the children learn through what is known as the *total physical response*. TPR is useful for all learners and teachers (Musthafa:19)

In this part, the paper shares on what the instructor should do and/or say. In other words, how to teach children with the hope that these will help you as a teacher in creating many positive and meaningful English lessons under your guidance.

- Make the rules, which should be fair and consistent, clear from the first day of class.
- Remember the students' names the first time you meet them. Encourage all students to remember their classmates' names. Use their names often when teaching (ie., talking to them, making requests, TPR exercises, playing games, etc.)

- Show the students what to do. Don't explain. Just do. They will follow the teacher's lead. English needs to be experienced, not explained.
- Give trust between the teacher and the students with each class. Through their actions let them know that the teacher will never embarrass them for making a mistake in English.
- Use eye contact to communicate the teacher's praise and disappointment.
- Create well-planned, consistent lessons with a predictable format which gives the students a sense of security and balance. Students feel more confident if they know what to expect.
- Always be pleasantly surprised when students interact with each other in English.
- Reassure the students that the teacher understands their English and also the teacher approves of their attempts.
- Show respect to the children.
- Use English as a tool to build their self-esteem.

The last part will tell about how to ensure children learn English using simple techniques that will absolutely make the teacher's job more fun and satisfying. Also, it will be expected that the teacher will have enough fresh ideas to be the most inspiring teacher that you possibly can. Given that the children have a very short attention span, the teacher is going to need a fresh idea about every five minutes. The teacher also needs to know how to turn games and activities into language learning opportunities so that the children learn to understand and speak English. These tips are for the teacher who is teaching 3-5 year old preschool children English as a foreign language in small to medium-sized groups. They are as follows:

- Be prepared-practice telling the stories before going into class and have the materials ready. This will allow the teacher to be relaxed and to enjoy the class and the children rather than frantically trying to organize the materials while the children become restless and bored.

- Change the games and activities every 5-10 minutes. This is vital because children need variety as they get bored easily and have a very short attention span.
- Repeat, review, and revise. Use short games to review vocabulary and phrases the teacher has taught earlier in the term and the year. If it is neglected, the children will have no recollection of the language the teacher has covered.
- Make the lessons playful and full of physical movement. The children will enjoy them more, be more motivated and remember the language better.
- Teach in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere with plenty of encouragement.
- Avoid competition with them. It can be stressful. Play games where everyone wins.
- Encourage learners. Never tell them they cannot do it or they have failed. The teacher should support them to learn English for life.
- Use rhymes and songs. These are great for frequent repetition of vocabulary and phrases.
- Do not burden children with reading and writing. They are still learning to write in their own language.
- Concentrate on listening and understanding, building vocabulary and the acquisition of short phrases.
- Concentrate also on speaking practice, starting with single words and short phrases.
- Avoid abstract concepts and concentrate instead on concrete real items that the children understand. For example: start with familiar topics such as colors, numbers, families, greetings, and short everyday phrases and sentences.
- Be flexible. If something is not working then change the game or activity.
- Bring in real objects. When the teacher cannot bring in real items use whatever objects are available in class, and use colorful pictures of real items in the games.

- Use stories. Vernon (2008) states that stories are good resources for children, who will want to hear the same tales told over and over again. Here are some great reasons to use stories to teach children English:
 1. Children love them.
 2. The story can be the main point of the lesson, giving meaning and context to odd words and phrases learned in isolation.
 3. They will be happy to hear the same stories over and over again which is fantastic for revision.
 4. The teacher can use the stories as a base for fun activities in class.
 5. Using stories gives the teacher another method and will lead to more variety in the lessons.
 6. Stories, along with songs, allow children to hear and understand far more English than any other method.

CONCLUSION

Techniques are important because they help the students understand and solve the problems in way that are appropriate for the situation at hand. Techniques can improve learning and make it faster. Therefore, the teachers much recognize the importance of students knowing and using a variety of techniques. It is important to ensure that the students learn to use the techniques on their own and do not always rely on the teachers to provide the necessary support.

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