

Teaching English to Young Learners through Games and Songs

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Abstract

Young English language learners have different characteristics compared to those adult English language learners. This would of course result in consideration on the teachers' side, particularly, about how to effectively and appropriately teach them inside the classroom. The treatment given by the EYL teachers to their students are supposed to be different. Young language learners always prefer to have the learning sessions in interesting and challenging ways. These are believed to be able to be achieved through implementing games and songs. This paper tries to elaborate how games and songs can be used in helping EYL teachers create positive atmosphere in the classroom so that the learning process can be much more interesting and meaningful.

Keywords: EYL, Games, Songs

INTRODUCTION

The way English teachers teach English to young learners needs to be different from the way they teach English to adults. It is because young learners possess special characteristics that should be treated in particular manners and be given typical attentions (Scott and Ytreberg, 2004). Once they frequently obtain sufficient exposure to the use of the language they learn, they will grow to become competent speakers of that language (Harmer: 2007).

Young learners—which are also considered children—could spontaneously have a really high enthusiasm and act more lively in the classroom. However, when they are asked to do tasks which they find hard, they would lose their learning interest more quickly and would feel unmotivated in following the lesson (Cameron, 2001).

It has become an impossible thing for young learners English teachers to provide their students with learning materials in the same level of difficulties all the time along their teaching process. Certainly, it will not help them to develop their competences in using the language. The learning materials,

however, should be varied; consisting of the high level of difficulties, average until the low ones. This is actually aimed at giving them favor to make their English better improved.

In presenting and explaining difficult materials to learners, teachers are expected to be able to find out an exciting teaching technique. This functions to omit the learners' prior perception towards such materials, so that they will want to get involved in the teaching learning activity inside the class with fun and pleasure. Linse (2005, p. 6) also suggests that "Many experienced teachers are aware that some children who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorders can attend to an activity for an extended period of time if they find the activity or task to be interesting".

From all of the statements above, it can be concluded that young learners English teachers are required to be creative in teaching their students. They are strongly suggested to apply a stimulating and interesting technique to be used inside the class when, especially, presenting difficult materials.

It is believed that songs can be chosen to be used as a mean to teach language skills and function as

reinforcement materials (Donald, 1976). Combining the language learning tasks with the great use of game and songs in the teaching learning process in the class makes students feel much more comfortable, interested, relaxed and the most important thing is that it may eliminate the feeling that one is being tested or seriously taught and as a result, they are not frustrated and able to follow such process with pleasure.

DISCUSSIONS

Songs in Teaching English for Young Learners

Why Songs?

There are five categorizations in which songs could be benefited as medium in teaching English for young learners (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003):

1. A linguistic resource
 - They allow new language to be introduced and structures and vocabulary to be reinforced and recycled.
 - They present familiar language in new and exciting forms and in a rich, imaginative context.
 - They provide for lots of natural and enjoyable repetition
 - They can be used to develop all skills in an integrated way
 - They help improve all aspects of pronunciation
2. A psychological/ affective resource
 - They are motivating and fun and help develop positive attitudes towards the target language.
 - They are non-threatening and the more inhibited child will feel secure when singing.
3. A cognitive resource

- They help to develop concentration, memory and coordination
4. A cultural resource
 - They are from authentic sources and can contribute to the cultural component of a language program. Children can be encouraged to compare with those in their own language.
 5. A social resource
 - Singing is a shared social experience and helps to develop a class and group identity
 - They can be used as the basis for a performance or show.

When and How to Use Songs

Young learners English teachers could make use of songs in every part of their teaching process. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003, p.168) state that songs may be possible to be placed either in their warming up teaching activities, as a transition from one activity to the next, or even closers: before finishing a class.

Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003, p. 168) propose several stages to be followed in using songs when teaching. Here they are:

- Set the context (explain purpose, background information)
- Pre-teach any necessary vocabulary using visual aids, actions, realia, puppets, focus questions, etc.
- Play on cassette or sing to allow children to listen, show understanding, familiarize themselves with the rhythm, tune, etc.
- Do further listening activity
- Work on pronunciation awareness, for example, indentifying intonation

- patterns, stressed words or syllables, etc.
- Invite children to listen, repeat and practice by joining in and learning to sing.
- Give a written record.
- Encourage children to compare with a similar type in their own language
- Present or perform as a whole class, in groups, in rounds, in pairs or if there is a question and answer sequence in the song, one part can be sung by half the class, the second part by the other half.

Games in Teaching English for Young Learners

Why Games?

Having games in class will help young learners English teacher make the teaching situation much more exciting. It is in line with the statement proposed by Martin (1995). Moreover, he emphasizes that any fun activity could provide those, young English learners, opportunity to rehearse the foreign language in a relaxed and enjoyable way.

Taken from Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2003, p. 172), below are the advantages of using games in the process of teaching English to young learners:

- They add variety to the range of learning situations.
- They change the pace of a lesson and help to keep learners' motivation
- They can help to improve attention span, concentration and memory.
- Learners are encouraged to participate; shy learners can be motivated to speak.
- They increase learner-learner communication which provides fluency practice and reduces the domination of the class by the teacher

- They help create a fun atmosphere and reduce the distance between teacher and learners.
- They help to make learning more memorable and accessible by using as many approaches as possible, such as mime and movement, use of colour and patterns, or personalization.
- The language in a game may encourage more creative use of language in addition to simple repetition.

How to Play Games

There are three things teachers need to remember in mind when trying to apply any games in their teaching activity. They are:

Giving Instructions

One of the most crucial steps when teachers would like to execute a game in class is that giving instructions (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003). Bear in mind that the instructions are much more appropriately stated in the forms of short, clear and simple ones. Using a limited number of key phrases which the children will quickly get used to could become a really good idea as well.

Organizing the Class

Teachers are required to determine either the games would be suitably applied for/as a group work, teams or pairs. However, it is strongly suggested that when we feel unconvinced whether the games are for those three things mentioned previously, team games look like an obvious choice (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2003).

Playing the Game

Before getting the game started, teachers need to introduce the language or some words that would be necessary in playing the game. It will help them to organize

themselves. When students are playing the game, it does not mean that teachers are extremely free from their duty. They, however possess a key role in observing, listening, monitoring the language used by students, giving explanation where necessary, paying attention to the students' language difficulties.

Scott, W.A., and Ytreberg, L.H. (2004). *Teaching English to Children*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

CONCLUSION

Young English learners are extremely different from adults. Sometimes they are easy to be motivated and sometimes they could feel unexcited in following the lesson really fast. Therefore, young English teachers have to be creative in implementing their teaching process in class. They could make use songs and games in order to create a fun learning environment, so that learners would become much more interested in getting involved in the lesson.

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