

TEACHING ENGLISH TO CHILDREN ORALLY AND AURALLY

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The relationship between a learner's age and his or her potential for success in second language acquisition is still the subject of much debate. Some authors argue that adults are able to learn a second language more rapidly than children, at least during the early stages of acquisition; other researchers hold that it is not necessarily true that adult learners cannot achieve a native-like accent in a second language. On the other hand, some evidence indicates that young children are more likely to attain native-like proficiency in a second language than teenagers or adults (Gass and Selinker 1994), probably due to the sensitive periods governing language development, and to psychological, cognitive and neurological factors. The previous considerations could be widely discussed from different points of view; however, we do not intend to discuss them in this article but instead we would like to share our experiences on teaching English to children orally and aurally.

Working on teaching English to children is perhaps one of the most enriching experiences for teachers; furthermore, when their students are still unable to understand written texts or produce them in their mother tongue, they are considered to have negative attitudes toward language, nevertheless this is a misconception. Working with children is a wealthy experience because although it seems to be funny, sometimes the teacher

has to play not only the tutor's role but also to play the role of "their parents" especially when they are too young to behave themselves in a classroom environment. Avoiding students' disputes, and mockery, sharing the break time, listening to their confidences, and sometimes giving them some advice, are some of the different activities the teacher has to carry out to get a human relationship with his/her students.

Trying to get children to learn a foreign language without having the reading and writing support (due to their early ages), is a challenging task to undertake in which the teachers' work depends, to a certain extent, on basically two skills: listening and speaking. That way, activities such as listening to songs, using realia, playing games, acting simple role plays, and other activities suggested by the Communicative Approach and the Total Physical Response, (T.P.R) should be taken into account by the teacher.

The previous consideration does not mean that learning a foreign language under these circumstances should be considered with a negative attitude. There are certain advantages as follows:

Firstly, the students do not devote their efforts either to learning how to understand written texts or to producing different pieces of writing, and this is a situation the teacher can take advantage

of by making good use of time and concentrating the students' efforts on developing the listening and speaking skills.

Secondly, if a program offers the development of the four skills, it is likely to find students (especially beginners) who pronounce words in the same way they are written. This mispronunciation is less frequent in children who are only taught both orally and aurally.

Thirdly, since the students are mainly exposed to the listening comprehension and oral expression, they have the opportunity to produce and understand short oral texts from the beginning of the process.

Teaching English to children without taking into consideration the reading and writing skills leads the teacher to look for, to use and to consider mechanisms of learning.

1. VISUAL AIDS. They are considered as universal language and permit us to get the impression of the world easier than words themselves "seldom do we communicate effectively through a single channel even when conditions are favorable" (Arno Walter Wittich 1967). The more senses involved in language learning the more likely to get better results, and it can be stated that the only contact with the world is carried out through the senses. Students learn vocabulary in an easier way through the use of pictures, realia, graphics and videos, by learning meaning directly without seeing the written words. The afore

mentioned materials should be carefully chosen in terms of size, color, purpose, availability and usefulness, so as to gain the student's motivation, attention, willingness, and better learning.

2. GAMES. They create a relaxing and amusing environment that permits learners to participate actively and freely. Unlike adults, children are more willing to participate in playing a game; they have a natural competitive spirit which permits them to concentrate on doing a task rather than on the language itself and children find playing a game a much richer language learning experience than doing other kinds of activities. Games are an enjoyable, and profitable form of practice to reinforce what has been taught in a more formal way and they develop active cooperation among the group. The games must be known by the learners in their mother tongue as much as possible, since this gives them certain authority and confidence and because they already know the rules governing the games.
3. PUPPETS. Definitely puppets ensure children's motivation and attention. William Littlewood states that motivation "is the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy he devotes to it and how long he/she perseveres", (1984). As far as attention is concerned, James O. Whittaker points out that we are constantly receiving several stimuli such as silence or noises which are

perceived by our senses; however, we are conscious about a limited number of these stimuli and we eliminate the others. We consciously concentrate our attention when we control those stimuli that are the focal point of our perception (1981). These non-language factors play an outstanding role when children are taught through the use of puppets. Puppets are quite useful especially with those shy young children who have fear to participate in spoken activities and permit the students to change their identity reducing their anxiety.

4. **SONGS.** Children like to sing in their mother tongue and in a foreign language as well. Singing songs is somehow an unconscious spoken way of learning vocabulary, structures, and grammatical functions. The use of songs permits the teacher to be aware of his/her students' pronunciation and to correct it at its due time. Needless to say that songs must be short, infantile, and easy to understand and to perform.
5. **IMITATION.** It is difficult to find support for the argument that languages are learned mainly through imitation and habit formation, if we consider the novel utterances that a language learner produces; however, this does not mean that imitation has no role to play in language learning. When children learn their first language, they imitate a great deal. Imitating suggests a complex process that includes: perceiving the model, attempting to reproduce the model, perceiving his own attempt and

evaluating its relation to the model, Corder (1975). Direct imitation will not necessarily lead to correct usage and children do not imitate at random. They are selective and concentrate on what they are currently learning. When teaching English to children orally and aurally, good teachers' pronunciation plays an important role since they will be regarded as a model to imitate from the early stages of learning.

6. **MIMICRY.** Since children are not exposed to reading and writing materials, mimicry becomes a very useful tool to be used in class. Facial expressions and corporal movements are potential resources to help children to understand and negotiate meaning.
7. **COMMANDS.** James Asher states that T.P.R. unlike most other methods, is directed to right-brain learning, and that children acquire language through motor movement which is a right-hemisphere activity and which occurs before the left hemisphere can process language for production. Besides, Asher sees the absence of stress as an important condition to language learning. The imperative drills reduce anxiety and stress and create an amusing learning environment in which children are more concentrated on performing and giving commands rather than on knowing the written words or the formal study of the language itself.

It is important to mention that language classes in which children use spoken

language are much noisier than those in which they do written exercises or read different texts. Teachers must be aware of this and try to negotiate times and rooms with other colleagues in order to avoid disrupting their classes. As we can see, teaching English to children without considering the writing and reading skills offers some advantages and some challenges. The activities mentioned above should be done every day in class because they give children valuable listening and speaking practice that enhances the possibilities of success when you try to teach English to children.

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