

When a Monster Became a Friend

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The word 'monster' is one that we have often heard in the stories told by our granny or in fiction and brings a horrible image to our minds, something like the experience I am going to share!

It was very early days in a new school. Also it was a new experience for me to be a facilitator of English in a school where English was the second language. I found that English was a 'Monster' in the mind of every child, especially in upper- primary classes because they don't get any hearing input from outside or from their environment (where listening is the first step to learn any language). So, if there are stories and articles in lesson, and if a child is not able to read and understand four or five words in every sentence, then it really becomes a challenge to understand the lesson. And I found it to be one of the cause why the children are afraid of English.

I could see many dull faces in my class: they were asking why I wanted to teach them this horrible subject.

How to drive away this perception?? It was a big challenge as it would not allow the children to be comfortable with English. Then how to deal with this problem? It was a big question for me. Anyway I started and everyday I was trying to motivate them through words and giving some examples. But I found the children still trying to run away from reading and writing by their own. There were only two children out of 30 in class 7 who were able to read, although hesitantly. By giving a little push to these two, I prepared about six children for reading in class. I then formed mixed groups, where they could help each other to read. Slowly two-thirds of the children in the class were able to read aloud. Now they gained a little confidence in reading. I was happy to hear them to read freely.

Writing and speaking were still a challenge. The children always demanded for readymade answers from me, without even trying to find the answers. They never thought that they could also write answers on their own. I was struggling to bring this confidence in them.

Fortunately we found a way. We had come to the lesson 'Alice in Wonderland', a very interesting story given in three parts in three books: the first in class 6, the second in class 7 and the third in class 8. I was dealing with class 7. So I started the lesson by telling the story in brief from the class six and seven books. But the story was incomplete. The third part was not available because we didn't have class 8 in our school. Although the book was available in our library, the children found it too long and difficult to read. So a colleague who taught class six and I planned a movie show. My colleague asked if we should show the movie in Hindi but I felt that if they saw it in English, it would be an opportunity to try and understand as much as they could. Then the movie was shown in English in our District Institute. The children enjoyed the movie and understood the story of Alice. They were able to connect it with their lesson, also observed many differences in the movie and the story in their book. As they were slowly getting into the story, they became interested enough to attend the English class to discuss the story, its characters. Until then, we had spent about ten days in telling the story, reading, discussing the dream scene, which made them give individual views on 'I dream to become when I grow up'.

That lesson, I found, was the 'magic spell' which made my classes interesting. So I thought to continue with some more activities. I asked the children to act out the story on the basis of the movie. They replied, 'How can we? We can't remember the dialogues.' I asked, 'We can make dialogues and make it a play'. They said, 'Yes, we can do it, but in Hindi. 'But I want it in English only' I said. At first they said it would be very difficult, but later they agreed, on condition that I wrote the dialogues. To this, I said, 'If I write it, you have to memorise the lines. That's more difficult. It would be easier if we write the script together.' They agreed.

Now I got my station from where I would catch my train. The children were very excited to write the script for the role-play. They translated the words

first. I wrote all their suggestions on the board. For example, they found words for ko, kya, pasand, poochegi, tumhe, sapne, etc.

The script-writing activity made the children enthusiastic about learning English. They learnt many new words some rules of grammar, while writing the script. This script writing took about fifteen days to complete. During this time children used to wait anxiously for the English period. They used to keep themselves ready with the next scene and used their imagination to make changes in the script.

When the script writing was over, the children started the preparation of the role-play. Half of the children were practicing while the other half were preparing the props needed for it. They made trees, grass, crowns, cards with chart paper. All the children seemed to be the part of this drama. Such beautiful group work I have never seen in my life. It was an example of wonderful coordination in a group work. This preparation took ten days to complete.

At last the great day came it was a Saturday, when

all the students of class 7 were ready to present the drama in front of all. The whole school enjoyed the performance and the children got much appreciation, which increased their self-confidence.

This particular activity played an important role to build up vocabulary, sentence structure, thinking, speaking and listening skills, improving their reading and writing imagination. After this, children attended English classes in the same way as their other subjects and tried to understand and open their mind to get into the subject. Now they try to read and write themselves also take a step forward to do the comprehension part. Now that 'Monster' seems to be their friend, whom they like to talk to, enjoy and play with.

In this process, I also learnt something: I found that the major thing that pulls us back from learning any language is fear. Being a foreign language English has become a monster in our minds. First we should be friendly with it, then try to make ourselves comfortable in the environment where we are least bothered by others' reactions if we speak any sentence that is grammatically wrong. Only then will it be possible to drive away this 'MONSTER'.

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