

Think, Sing, Write: Songs in language classrooms

This article puts forth methods to aid children to produce their own language in English classrooms using song as a discourse. These methods stem from the Acquiring Competency in English (ACE) workshop conducted by Dr. Anandan K N at the Azim Premji Foundation.

How are children able to repeat the lines of a song, even when they do not understand its meaning? Well, it is because they can recognize the tune of the song. When children listen to jingles, songs or rhymes, the pattern in the song gets registered first. In a language class, it does not end there. Unless songs are adequately emoted, it remains a mere assortment of words. Hence, when attempting to generate songs at the primary level and poetry at advanced levels, it is crucial to present the printed text with emotions.

While facilitating language acquisition among young learners of English, creating interest is very important. The interest is created by kindling their thought process. The general claim that we think in a certain language, is a myth. In fact, we do not think in any specific language but we think in images. These images are communicated through language. Since children's ability to produce language is not as strong as in adults, they need help from teachers. The teacher asks questions to help them frame and concretize their thoughts. This starts the thinking process and the learners gradually learn to use specific words to communicate their thoughts. In this process, the teacher works as a facilitator who helps children discover their ability to produce



language. The enjoyment and excitement in singing rhymes is greater when children produce their own lines by parodying familiar rhymes or even finding new combination of words that make sense.

Method 1: Building up on an existing patterns

Children can create their own rhymes building on from an existing pattern. Let us take an example of a rhyme.

These are roses

Roses are red

Some are white

Some are yellow

Are there any blue roses?



For instance, if a teacher intends to help children of classes, II & III create a similar rhyme, they are first asked to name the flowers that are familiar to them.

Children may come up with varied responses - rose, lotus, jasmine, sunflower etc. If they respond in their mother tongue, the teacher

can ask other students whether they know the English word for it. If someone gives the right word, the teacher can repeat it loudly for the whole class. The teacher says, "These are roses" and a boy may say, "These are lotuses". This is completely acceptable because he likes lotuses. Every line has generative capacity. It should be related to their life to be productive. The teacher sensitizes the children to the concept of a "flower" and not "rose" because, a grade three learner can relate to the concept of "flower" better than the concept of "rose" or "jasmine". Moreover, a flower of their choice allows freethinking, which results in better production of language.

The resulting pattern will be as follows -

These are lotuses

Lotuses are pink

Some are white

Some are red

Are there any green lotuses?



For grade 1, the following pattern can be introduced.

This is a car,

A car, a car, a car

This is a bus,

A bus, a bus, a bus.

I have a pencil in my hand.

I have a chocolate in my bag.

Use above patterns and help the children make songs by replacing the words.

Method 2: Using familiar objects

Whenever you introduce a rhyme/song, students should understand the pattern. Do

not worry about the pronunciation; focus on where the word appears. The words appear depending on the mood and the mindset of the person, which may vary from time to time.

The teacher can generate a pattern about what children see around in the class – using chairs, benches, bottles, blackboard, chalk etc. in the class. Now, help children make a rhyme using the things the children list. All this is possible even in class I & II.

For E.g.:

A bottle can be kept on the table and children are asked questions around it. Out of the multiple responses, choose one response and add another line to it.

I have a bottle

The bottle is on the table

Continue asking questions regarding the position of other objects near the bottle and link it to the position of that object.

I have a bottle,

The bottle is on the table

I have a table

The table is on the floor

I have a floor

The floor is in the room



Look at the whole text, and make it possible for the students to sync the tune to the text. Put the verses in the order and make them understandable.

Method 3: Using pictures

A picture is created step by step. Each step feeds into the song as a line. This demands the



attention of children and hence distractions can be controlled in class.

Draw the picture of a tree on the board with the involvement of the students and ask

'What is it?'

Possible responses will be "A tree/ tree/ this is a tree". The teacher is free to choose the response that will become the pattern of the song. In this case, we select "This is a tree."

This is a tree.

Now ask, "Where is the tree?" You may get another set of response which can be added as the next line of the song.

This is a tree

The tree is on the ground.

And children play, children play around

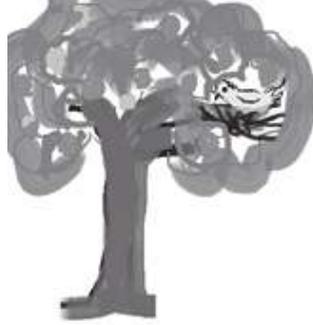
The teacher can draw a branch and thus keep adding elements to the picture and simultaneously add them to the song by asking questions as mentioned in the previous sequence.

There is a branch,

The branch is on the tree,

And children play, children play around

There is a nest,



The nest is on the tree,

And children play, children play around."

Add characters to the picture like a bird and a girl near the tree....initiate a discussion to frame another song. Children can frame the poem based on an imaginary conversation between the girl and the bird. Select any response to make the rhyme.

"Little bird, little bird

Can you sing a song?

Yes girl, yes girl,

I can sing a song,

Little girl, little girl,

Can you dance a

dance?

Yes girl, yes girl,

I can dance a dance.



For transacting poems from the textbook, the teacher can use the same picture strategy, which will help them construct the meaning.

The teacher can display the songs generated by learners in the classroom and create a print rich environment. This will help in developing reading skills. Children are capable of coming up with fresh and innocent ideas that need to be communicated effectively. Initiating dialogues will help them structure their thoughts, foster thinking and produce their own language. Employing these techniques in the classroom makes the language learning experience exciting and productive.

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