



Using Authentic Materials to teach English Language in Primary Class

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In my career as a Primary School Teacher, I have often wondered why my students were not speaking in English and were so eager to lapse into Tamil. For me, taking classes was a big challenge as I had to use my home language to teach. I tried out various methods but despite my efforts, my students always answered in monosyllables and generally got scared of English classes. This was when I thought of doing something different.

I realized that children need to be exposed to a language-rich environment to achieve a reasonable level of competency in English.

Language-rich environment is a 'setting in which a child is surrounded by talk and has plenty of opportunities to communicate with others'. This usually happens at home where children learn to speak their mother tongue. But how to create a similar environment in the classroom that would help students develop communicative skills in English?

Language - rich Environment

I started using interesting classroom materials to teach English. Initially, I prepared different types of charts and hung them around the class. The children saw the charts and gradually began to recognize and read the words written on them quite fluently. But when it came to using words in context they floundered. This was when the idea of using authentic materials to teach English as a second language (ESL) struck me.

Authentic materials

What exactly are authentic materials? These are resources (texts and materials) that are created to help students use language in real-life situations and not simply for language teaching purposes. They are effective in teaching because:

- They motivate students to learn.

- They provide authentic information on certain subjects.
- They expose the students to real language situations.
- They make classroom teaching and learning more creative and interactive.

Along with textbook-oriented materials like charts and flash cards, I also began using authentic resources like oil containers, soap wrappers, empty shampoo bottles and children's magazines to develop communicative competency in my students.

Photos from the surrounding

Objective : To help children relate words to the photos and develop vocabulary in a meaningful way.

Procedure :

- I pasted photos of cars, vegetables and festivals along with the corresponding words on classroom walls.

- The children saw the photos and gradually were able to recognize and read the words fluently. This went on for a few weeks.

- By pointing at certain photos, I asked the children questions like:

- ♦ "Do you like cars or buses?"
- ♦ "Which is your favorite festival?"

- ♦ "Which are vegetables that your mother uses for making sambar?"

- The children answered the questions by pointing at the appropriate pictures and talked about their experiences related to the objects in the photos.

Benefits :

- By doing this activity, I remarked that children looked more relaxed in class and spoke about their experiences.
- Learning was more joyous and took place at a child's own pace.

There were, however, many children who did not participate in the photo activity so I had to come up with interactive methods of teaching to develop their communicative skills and interest. For this, I used the following approach :

- For children who loved poems, I introduced rhyming words through an action song called 'Team work' from the textbook. The students answered many questions based on the rhyme and became familiar with the words.

- For some others, I used pictures of body parts with the corresponding vocabulary. The children had to match them and answer questions on some of them like, "How do you rinse your mouth?" or "How do you wash your hair?"

Puppets

Puppets could become effective teaching-aids for developing communicative competencies in children when integrated into conversations or dialogues.

Finger Puppets :

Objective : Use of finger puppets to teach children about family members.

Procedure :

- I made a few simple finger puppets, coloured them and made a bit of art work to make them look like father, mother, brother sister and soon.
- I showed them to the children by asking questions on who they were and whether they had some of their relatives living close by. I also asked them to describe some of them. This made the class enjoyable



and interesting. Lot of talk happened and the children wanted to show the puppets to their friends.

- I also showed them how easy it was to make the finger puppets by using paper, sketch pens and a bit of glue. The children warmed up to me and began making their own puppets and used them to converse with their friends.

Benefits :

- Children learned about family relations in an interactive manner.
- The children made their own puppets and their creativity developed.

Stick Puppets (Smiley) :

Objective : Use of stick puppets with smileys to help children express emotions and learn about expressions.

Procedure :

- As an extension of the finger puppet activity, I used stick puppets with smileys pasted on them to teach vocabulary of sentiments.
- The smileys taught children, amongst a hundred other terms, words pertaining to different facial expressions like sadness, surprise, happiness, fear and anger.
- I helped students create dialogues between the different puppets like :
 - ◆ "Why are you sad?"
 - ◆ "My mother is ill!"
 - ◆ "I am happy because I bought a ball."
 - ◆ "You are looking tired."
 - ◆ "Yes, I played football."

Benefits :

- The use of smiley puppets helped develop my students' questioning and answering skills and made the class more interactive as children talked about their emotions and sentiments.

Children's Magazines

Children's magazines are seen in every book shop and stall around town but how many of us really think of using



them to teach English? If used properly, magazines could become an effective medium to teach communicative functions to children.

Objective :

- To help children talk about the pictures on a magazine page.
- To help students develop vocabulary and simple grammar structures for communicative purposes.
- To develop reading skills in children through peer activity.

Procedure :

- I divided the class into small groups.
- I gave children's magazines with bright illustrations to each group.
- Each group had to choose a picture from the magazine and say a simple sentence about it.
- Initially the children used phrases like "The sky is blue," or the "The grass is green..."
- Slowly I went around the class and asked the students to talk about other things from the picture.
- The students began saying many more sentences to each other and an interactive group activity took place.

Benefits :

- Communicative skills of students improved through peer learning.
- Colourful magazine pictures motivated students to talk more freely.

Masks

Children very often find it difficult to formulate questions. How to help them improve their questioning skills by using when, where, what, why, who and which? The question words at the back of the lessons were a challenge to me in my class. I designed an entire sequence of dialogues and made them do a role play in class by using masks. Before making them do a role-play I asked them a lot of questions beginning with how? Why? Where? What? When? Which? This was an interesting activity as children whole-heartedly participated in it.



Once this was done, the class was divided into groups and one section asked a question and the opposite section answered it.

Objective :

Use of masks to develop questioning skills in children.

Materials used : Masks of animals and popular characters.

Procedure :

- I got masks of animals and other favorite characters like Chota Bheem and Mickey Mouse from the shop.
- I taught the children a few dialogues about food habits and the place where these animals or characters live by using the above mentioned words to formulate questions.
- The children enacted the dialogues in pairs before the class and talked for 3 to 4 minutes continuously in English.
- Slowly there was a rush as to who will come forward to speak in front of the class.
- The students began making their own masks for role-plays.

Benefits :

- Questioning skills improved.
- Dialogues created a real-life situation and children became more motivated to talk.
- Children gained more knowledge about animals and their favourite characters through a questioning and answering activity.
- Children's creativity got developed.

Conclusion

Communicative language proficiency plays a crucial role in getting along in life by using various language functions and also for developing confidence in children. Since English is an alien language and children who study it in our government schools do not have sufficient exposure to it, it is our duty as teachers to create a language rich environment in our classrooms. In this context, the use of authentic materials is certainly an effective teaching-aid for meaningful learning to take place amongst our students.

