



Easy English Creating English Rich Environment in School

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Background :

In Pondicherry, all the government schools have been converted into CBSE system. Most students studying in government rural schools are less privileged as far as learning English is concerned. English is still an alien language in most of the rural school children of Pondicherry. There is very little exposure to English language for them. This makes it difficult for the teachers to teach the students English without the use of home language.

On a particular day, I encountered an unusual incident in a classroom. The class teacher of Standard V was on leave so I went to the class to teach. I asked a student, "Where is your book?" He did not respond as he could not understand what I was saying. Finally, he answered, "Neenga English la pesuringa" (You are speaking in English). It struck me hard and made me realize the importance of learning English to communicate and express one's thoughts and feelings.

I felt that the school should intervene in this matter to facilitate students' learning. For this, it was important to create opportunities for the students to listen to and use the target language. So I discussed about this with my school teachers and we came up with certain plans to facilitate English language learning in a natural way. We felt that the learning will be effective only when it happens in a natural, fun-filled and care free atmosphere.

How could a programme for English language learning be enjoyable at the same time be effective? In our school we teachers got together to frame an effective and systematic plan to enrich the communicative capabilities of our children. After much deliberation we came up with certain ideas that could be started straightaway; setting up of reading corners in all classes, making the daily

assembly session interactive by allotting 15 min every day for developing communicative skills in children and using language games and activities based on their lessons. We wanted to keep the programme child friendly and pave the way to make English language learning stress free.

The Four Interventions :

As a way forward plan, the school decided to come up with four interventions which have rich pedagogical values: Reading corners, Language games and activities, Interactive morning assembly and a Print-rich environment.

1. Reading Corner

Aim : To introduce children to books and slowly develop their reading habits.

To make this program effective the books should be selected with the cognitive level of the children in mind. The books so chosen have to be graded, and arranged in tables or shelves at the eye level of the children. Some schools have even used a rope tied across the classroom and hung the books. Selection of books is important. There are plenty of illustrated books available in the market. They could be; pictorial books, bi-lingual books, story books, activity books and work books.

The reading corner is an important concept which is different from a library. The reading corner can be set up in every class. The books will be at the level of the students and they can easily pick one up and leaf through. Unlike a library, the books in a reading corner are smaller in numbers and choosing a book becomes easier for the children. Contributing books for the reading corner would be a welcome move. Once the community is sensitized to this concept there would be volunteers to contribute books to build a good collection.

Every day the teacher could allot a specific time for the children to go to the reading corner, take books, read and exchange with friends. Initially they may not read at all. Still it will give them a chance to handle a book, leaf through the pages and gaze at the pictures. Here the teacher can slowly tell them the ways to handle a book. She can sit with groups of children and talk to them about the pictures in the book. Slowly other children will warm up to her. Once they become familiar with the process the books can be issued home.



Activities in reading corner : Teacher can sit with the children and read aloud a story and this will be an interactive session. There are various strategies that could be used in storytelling.

Strategy :

Leave the story incomplete at the climax point. In the next class the children will be eager to know the continuation of the story. It will create an interactive session and a lot of talk will ensue. Slowly the vocabulary can be developed and spoken skills enhanced.

Outcome :

- It will keep the students engaged.
- Their listening skills will be enhanced.
- Interest in English language will be kindled.
- It will enable students to understand English in the most natural settings.

Experience and Reflections :

To set up a reading corner in the school, we

identified a room. We brought books both Tamil and English from the Education Department. This reading corner also served as a mini library for the school. We kept story cards and books, magazines like "India Today." It was an intervention that we initiated for all the students to benefit. We had an expected result. But we felt that it was not enough. The experience made us to reflect on how we could improve our interventions. As we reflected on this, we found out that lack of proper guidelines was the major contribution to its poor result. It also made us think whether the books and other items kept in the reading corner weren't interesting enough for the children. Since the belief was strong in us to create English learning opportunities for the students, we had to come up with ways to strengthen these interventions. To support the efforts to make the reading corner effective, appropriate games and activities could be conducted to develop the interest in children towards English.

2. Language games and activities

It was our firm belief that English should be learnt in rich context like the first language. To create this context in the classroom and school, sufficient English inputs and exposure should be provided to the students. Under such exposure, once the students are familiar with the sounds and words of English, they will be able to start speaking in English. The students should be given ample space to use the target language, practice and master it. It is also important to note that children construct their own meaning of the world and concepts around them. Therefore our teaching methodology should respect the children's experience and base our teaching around it.

Language games and activities have multiple educational values both academic and non-academic. There are varieties of games and activities for building vocabulary, teaching concepts, grammar, stories etc. Similarly, games and activities can be used for classroom management, peer learning, interest, motivation, confidence etc. Some of them are specific for classroom usage while others can be used for language learning outside the classroom. Terms like - proper noun and common noun, pronoun etc. are taught through the language games.

Activity :
Preposition :

Materials required : Chocolates

Procedure : Teacher hides the chocolates behind a cupboard, under the table, on the bag, beside the table, over the shelf.

These are low cost activities that need no prior planning

Experiences & Reflections :

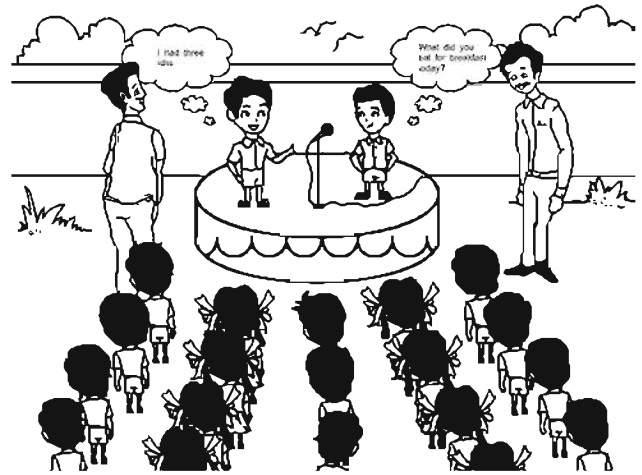
The children were initially hesitant. A few came forward and attempted to participate when the teacher explained the equivalent in their home language. Slowly they started warming up and started looking forward to the English classes. It is a great effort on the part of teachers to think of different games for the children. Sometimes when they were constrained to complete the portions and these activities may not be possible. It would be effective if teachers design activities based on the lesson and use it for assessment purposes also.

3. Interactive Morning assembly

Assembly can be more resourceful than what it is normally used for. We can use this space to give English inputs storytelling, learning rhymes and singing songs to the students. The teachers can take turns telling stories (bi-lingual) thrice a week or teach English rhymes and songs every day. External experts on storytelling, puppetry etc. could also be called in. At a later stage, we can introduce role plays, conduct competitions like - extempore speech, debate etc. to provide an opportunity for the students to use the target language.

Strategy :

Two teachers can do a role-play in English for 5 min discussing a topic closer to the children's everyday happenings. The teachers can do it for 4 days in the assembly in front of the whole school. On the 5th day volunteers can be asked to do a similar role-play for 5 minutes. The topic and the vocabulary list could be given a day before. Children can come in pairs and do the role-play.



Outcome :

Stage fear goes.

Children's attention span develops.

Spoken and communicative skills develop in natural settings.

Listening skills get enhanced.

Peer learning and assessment takes place.

4. Print-Rich Environment

The school should take an initiative to expose the students to maximum visual materials. As it is, students like to draw and express their thoughts through drawing. It takes only a simple effort for the teachers to make sure that these drawings can be utilized for teaching the target language. The teacher can also use the concept of "Graffiti Wall" where the students' own creations - vocabularies, language games and activities, can be drawn, pasted or hung on. The teachers and students can collaboratively paint and make some posters (which have the target language written on them), collect locally available authentic materials like news-papers, empty cartons of food products, wrappers of chocolates and so on and create stories and songs. This intervention will provide the students to get familiar with the written language.

Way Forward :

To sharpen our next interventions, it is essential to have proper plan with clear cut objectives behind it. These are a few interventions the school has

developed. The school will explore other opportunities to create English rich environment, which will serve two main purposes:

- (i) Creating varied **input** rich environment that is, the students be given plenty of verbal and written opportunities to become familiar with the target language.
- (ii) Providing sufficient opportunities for **output** that is, space for the students to use the target language.

This Article was presented by Mr. V. Ramanathan at the 'Medayil Thisaimaani' seminar in October 2014. We are presenting to you the full version of this article in this issue. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends on his untimely demise. Through this article, we hope to join his fellow teachers and students in continuing the efforts he started during his lifetime.

