

Teaching and Learning English in a Holistic way – Dr. Anandan's Workshop

If you want to teach something, first you should learn it. Yes, we wish our students to speak in English but how many of us are speaking in English in our classroom? Not many. Teaching English to our school children is a challenging task for us. We are teaching English as a subject not as a language. This is why we are not reaching the goal. English should be acquired in the same way as we acquired our mother tongue. Mr. Anandan, a linguist cum second language expert from Kerala conducted the session for the teachers. I was blessed to meet him and to attend his workshop. I wish to share my experience with you all. Mr. Anandan suggested many methodologies to teach English as a second language in the classroom.

Moving from fragments to theme based interactions :

He focused on the use of discourses and the holistic way of approaching language teaching. You cannot teach English in fragments because fragments don't make meaning. Alphabets, words or even sentences don't convey meaning. We need to use discourses – discourses could be conversations, descriptions or poems. It is not sufficient for children to read and write without making meaning; they should be able to speak English. We, as teachers must create an environment where children listen to English, especially because they hardly get such an environment at home.

There is a theme in each of the units. It may be a lesson or a poem. Every unit is based on a theme; the theme of the particular unit can be guessed by the children. Teacher need not to say what

the unit is all about, but it must come from the children through interaction between teacher and students. Teacher should toss an appropriate question to the students so that they come out with the theme. For instance, teacher may show the picture given in the respective unit and may ask what the children think about it (children's perception). This theme interaction process is very useful for teachers to know/judge the children's understanding of the theme. Children can come up with some other things similar to this. During this process, we can provide a lead to the reading text. The children themselves found the interaction interesting and it motivated them.

After this, we can organize a concept map. From the oral interaction words, ideas uttered by the children can be displayed through flow charts, timelines, fish-bone diagram etc. These must be displayed in the classroom before the actual reading starts. Teacher should be conscious so that vocabulary related to the theme and the chapter was covered and this vocabulary must also be displayed. The main agenda is making the children describe the concept.

Supporting reading :

Here are some steps through which the teacher can support the reading process

- i. Individual reading: Teacher shouldn't read the lesson/poem first. The child is allowed to read the text individually. Provided the following instructions are given. i.e. open to page number __, (while reading) if something isn't understood, put an 'X' mark, if you understand, put

a '✓' mark, if something is interesting put a * mark. There may be situations where only few '✓' marks are found. This doesn't matter, since the theme of the unit was already discussed in the previous stage 1 module. The child can read a minimum number of sentences and understand.

- ii. Collaborative reading: now, after the individual reading children can be divided into small groups of 4 or 5. Here they are instructed to share what they understood i.e. the tick '✓' marks ideas. Each child should share his/her ideas. Then ideas that are not understood should be shared. During this time of sharing, teacher moves around and observes what is happening in each group. Teacher can discuss with each group and list the problems faced by them. The solution of those problems may be found by asking about them in an open group, or teachers can give the solutions.
- iii. Scaffold reading: reading with the help of extrapolative questions (going beyond the text). Anandan stressed that it essential for the teacher to kindle the interest in children by asking analytical, reflective, cause-consequential questions that help the learners assimilate the text by virtue of localizing and personalizing it.
- iv. Reading aloud: the teacher can read the passage aloud which will help the learners make better sense of the reading passage. Moreover, the teacher's reading will serve as listening input for the learners in terms of some of the articulation features. Teacher should motivate the learners to read for comprehension. When the children read

word by word no real reading occurs. Teacher should let the children practice in chunk reading mode (reading three or four words together for understanding). In the beginning students can use some marks to identify the pauses given. Pauses must be given wherever punctuations (full stop, comma, question mark) and conjunctions occur.

My classroom experience with this approach

Reading

I have tried this method in my class V. Children enjoyed it a lot and showed more interest on reading. Children helped each other while reading. They themselves came out with the meaning after reading each sentence. Here and there they asked my help to find out the meaning of new words. Some used the dictionary to crack the meaning.

Drama

I also tried to introduce content to students dramatically and playfully. I tried this in both Tamil and English classes. I have done many dramas and play activities in my classes. When I do these activities in my class I choose a story and I write dialogues for the drama and I demonstrate to the children how to act. Whenever we created drama for school or class I would do all these things. I thought it was good and effective for the students and it saved time as well. But after attended his session I got a clear picture of how to create drama and its situations, which include giving most of the work to the students. They themselves plan what they going to do, they themselves create situation, dialogues and characters without properties. We are just guides. In that way I did this in my class, the children prepared a play themselves and acted well. Actually their dialogue and situation acting were all better than my preparation and they

understood all the content in that particular unit. I was very happy too. Sometimes some students did not participate in any activities prepared by us, but only those activities prepared by his /her friends, so all the students interested and curious to work with their friends acted as well. This kind of peer learning will help us too because we can't

explain the entire content to all students but this activity helps them to understand each every part of the syllabus; not only do they learn the syllabus but they learn and develop many skills. I had totally lively classroom experience with the students. I request you all to try this method in your class and share your thoughts.



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