TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRIMARY LEARNERS THROUGH DRAMATIZATION AND COMIC STRIPS

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Abstract

21st century is the age of information and technology. As such, the world today has become a global village and so the importance of English as a link language has increased tremendously. So, the teaching of English has now become a focus of attention for all educators and English teachers. Teaching of English as an academic subject in a conventional way, proved futile and so now emphasis is put on teaching English not as an academic subject but as a skill subject. Therefore, using modern teaching methods and authentic materials is emphasized. Many new methods and authentic materials are now available and used in the field of English language teaching. The present paper throws light on the benefits and use of one such modern method, viz., the use of dramatization and comic strips in the teaching of English to the primary students.

Keywords: Dramatization, Comic Strips, Teaching of English, Primary Students

Introduction

Research has proved beyond doubt that for effective teaching and learning, it is extremely important to use methods of teaching which are student-centered. Both dramatization and use of comic strips in teaching are such methods where it is the students, who play a dominant role in handling the language. Again, both the methods are such that students are exposed to authentic language in the form a natural discourse. Students learn language without any fear or inhibition.

Elif Gene summarizes a few studies proving the benefits of the use of dramatization in language learning. Drama activities can be used as a means of reinforcement of the language learnt (Mordecai1985, Fernandez and coil1986). It helps to extract, retain and reinforce vocabulary and sentence structure through role-play and communication game.

The problem of mixed ability is reduced when drama activities are used. Students who are fluent can take main roles which require more oral communication, while weaker students compensate for their lack of linguistic ability by paralinguistic communication, for e.g. body language and general acting ability (miming).
Use of Dramatization in teaching English

There are various forms of dramatization like role-play, simulation, scripted play, improvisation and mime. These forms can be effectively used to teach different linguistic skills.

Role-play is an activity whereby students have to act out a role of someone else. Whereas Simulation is an activity where a real life situation is created in the classroom. At lower primary level, all four skills LSRW can be taught effectively using both role-play and simulation. Speaking skills can be easily taught using role-play. Students have to play different roles like that of a doctor, a teacher, a lawyer etc. Playing such roles will not only enhance the speaking skill but can also improve the listening skill of the students. After the role-play, the students can be immediately asked to write down the new words they have learnt or a few dialogues they remembered, thereby writing skill can also be taught and then the students should be made to read their written work and as their reading skill can also be taken care of simultaneously.

In scripted plays, the students are given script, which is either written by a teacher or by the students themselves. In improvisation, the students have to act impromptu without any script. Both Scripted plays and improvisation can be effectively used in upper primary classes. Through dramatic performance, the listening and speaking skills of the students can be enhanced. One can even teach correct pronunciation and intonations through scripted plays. Students can be given plots and asked to write scripts in pairs and groups leading to the improvement of listening, speaking and writing skills. Even grammar can be taught using scripted plays.

Role-play once again can be effectively used to help children learn to write creative writing like biographies and autobiographies. The students can be asked to play the role of famous personalities. Once again, listening, speaking and writing skills can be taught.

In Mime, there are no dialogues. Body movements and expressions are used and the students have to guess on the basis of acting. Mime can be effectively used to teach vocabulary at lower levels and again at higher levels students can be taught creative writing effectively through mime. Students can be asked to mime a story. Then they should be asked to tell the story and then finally write it.

As there are different types of drama forms which can be effectively used to teach different aspects and skills of English language, there are also different techniques of drama which can be effectively used not only for teaching but also reinforcing what is learnt.
These drama techniques also known as drama conventions or drama strategies are useful tools, which a teacher can use creatively according to her teaching needs. Few of these techniques are Freeze Frame, Conscience Alley, Soliloquy, Hot Seating, Flash Light, Fly on the Wall, Thought Tracking, Forum and Tableaux.

Few popular drama techniques like hot seating can be effectively used for revising various aspects of language like grammar, vocabulary and its usage. Both listening and speaking skills can be enhanced in a fun way as students love to come on the hot seat.

Soliloquy technique can be effectively used for descriptive writing where a scene is played and then the students reflect, expressing their thoughts in a loud voice. Forum can be used effectively to recapitulate and thereby enhance the listening and speaking skills. In the same way, Fly on the Wall technique can also be used for creative writing whereby the students have to imagine themselves as flying and describe an imaginary place or a situation like they are in a garden and they have to describe the various things that they see in a garden.

Use of Comic strips in Education and English language teaching is also very beneficial according to Michelle Manno. The benefits of using comics in education can be very effectively summed up in the words of Josh Elder, the Founder and President of ‘Reading with Pictures’. He sums up the strengths of comics as educational tools with his “Three E’s of Comics”:

1. **Engagement**: Comics impart meaning through the active engagement of a reader with written language and juxtapose sequential images. Readers must actively make meaning from the interplay of text and images, as well as by filling in the gaps between panels.

2. **Efficiency**: The comic format conveys large amounts of information in a short time. This is especially effective for teaching content in the subject areas (math, science, social studies, etc.).

3. **Effectiveness**: Processing text and images together leads to better recall and transfer of learning. Neurological experiments have shown that we process text and images in different areas of the brain: known as the Dual-Coding Theory of Cognition. These experiments also indicate that pairing an image with text leads to increased memory retention for both. With comics, students not only learn the material faster, they learn it better.
As Justine Derrick states, “the most important factor in the development of reading skill is the amount of time the student actually spends reading. (Cummins, 2003) One of the ways that ESL/EFL teachers can increase the amount of time their students read is by comics and graphic novels.

Comic strips are also very effective medium which a teacher can use to teach all four skills LSRW in an innovative and entertaining way. The teacher can make use of the readymade comic strips from the newspaper or comic books by selecting appropriate contents according to the level of the students or the comics can be made by the teacher or students.

Reading skills can be enhanced by encouraging the students to read the comic strips which are selected by the teacher. Then the students should be asked to write the new words that they have come across in their reading of the comic strips and to find their meanings, synonyms and antonyms and also to use these new words in the sentences of their own. Thus, along with reading, vocabulary can be effectively taught, and if the students are asked to do the vocabulary activity in pairs or in groups, then speaking and listening skills can also be enhanced.

The teacher can herself make comic strips for selected grammar topics and thereby teach grammar also in fun way. In assignments the students can be asked to make similar strips.

In comic strips, a few speech bubbles should be left empty whereby the students should be made to write the dialogues on their own. Through the activity, the sentence structure can be effectively taught to the children in an inductive way.

At the upper primary level the teacher should provide them only with a few panels of a story and the class should be asked that using brainstorming and discussions, they should complete the story, and thereby all four skills can be dealt with in a very interactive way.

At lower primary level, the teacher should jumble the panels of the story and then ask the students to arrange the panels of the story in proper sequence, and thereby reading skill can be improved. The teacher can go a step further and not provide the last panel and ask students to use their imagination and add the climax of the story.

**Conclusion**

As English being a skill subject and it being very different from the academic subject, an English teacher especially at the primary level should make use of innovative methods and materials. As discussed above, both dramatization and comic strip with their many benefits
should be incorporated along with other methods and materials to enhance the teaching of English subject.

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