

USING NURSERY RHYMES AND SONGS TO TEACH ENGLISH TO YOUNG CHILDREN

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Abstract

Knowing some basic principles of language learning, characteristic of children and classroom techniques, especially nursery rhymes and songs, which are suitable for teaching English for children, is very crucial for the English teachers. In addition to this, the teachers are required to know well about the prominent learning principles such as cognitive inter-actionist, social inter-actionist principles, and characteristics of children. By having such knowledge, teachers can improve their teaching materials as well as teaching technique which are suitable with the children's development and capacity.

Keywords: *nursery rhymes, songs, cognitive inter-actionist, social inter-actionist principles, characteristics of children*

INTRODUCTION

As an international language, English has gained its popularity all over the world, including Indonesia. In the past English was only taught as secondary schools. In current years, however, the teaching English of is expanding into primary or elementary school settings. The decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture number 0487/4/1992, chapter VIII states that English can be taught as an extra instruction if it is needed by the local community, and if the teacher of English is available. Another decree of Ministry of Education and Culture, No 060/U/1993

states that English may be given to Elementary school students as a local content. The phenomena have caused many English educators charged with teaching teacher education and/or curriculum and materials development to raise questions about how to best to teach English as a foreign language to young children.

Teaching English to young learners involves more than merely teaching the language. Both the social and cognitive development of learners as well as the linguistic need to be taken into account when planning for and working with the five to twelve age group. From experience,

the best way to teach children English is to not only get them physically involved within the lesson, but also to create the illusion that they are simply playing games. And rather than focus on individual development, it is also a very good idea to promote class interaction as far as possible.

This paper presents some basic principles of language learning, characteristic of children and classroom techniques, especially nursery rhymes and songs, which are suitable for teaching English for young learners will complete this presentation.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

This part discusses several principles of learning and the correlation with language learning. The prominent learning principles worth discussing for teaching children are cognitive interactionist, social interactionist principles, and characteristics of children. This discussion is then followed by nursery rhymes and song as media for teaching English to young children.

Cognitive Interactionist Principles

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, was primarily interested in how knowledge

developed in human organisms. According to his theory, cognitive structures are patterns of physical or mental action that underlie specific acts of intelligence and correspond to stages of child development. He has integrated both behavior and cognitive aspects in one developmental theory. He put forward four primary developmental stages, namely: sensorimotor, pre-operations, concrete operations, and formal operations. In the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), intelligence takes the form of motor actions. Intelligence in the pre-operation period (3-7 years) is intuitive in nature. The cognitive structure during the concrete operational stage (8-11 years) is logical but depends upon concrete referents. In the final stage of formal operations (12-15 years), thinking involves abstractions. (Piaget, 1972)

Piaget sees the children as continually interacting with the world around them solving problems that are presented by the environment and learning occurs through taking action to solve the problems. And knowledge that results from these actions is not imitated or from birth but is “actively constructed” by the child. In this way thought is seen as deriving from action; action is internalized, or carried out

mentally in the imagination, and in this way thinking develops.

Based on Piaget we may conclude that children in primary or elementary school are at the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. This means that they learn through hands or experience and through manipulation of objects in the environment. They primarily learn by doing activities. Therefore, when children are learning science or mathematics content they need to be actively involved in experimenting with mathematics or science materials that they can manipulate. If this principle is extended to EFL setting, it means that children language classes need to be active rather than passive; they need to be engaged in activities of which language is a part. They need to be working on meaningful tasks and use language to accomplish those tasks. (Hudelson, 1996)

Classroom activities should create and offer opportunities to learners for learning.

Social Interactionist Approach

Vygotsky's main concern is that social interaction and social context, a world full of other people, who interact with the child from birth onwards, are essential in the cognitive development. He

states that "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level (between people or interpsychological, and later, on the individual level (inside the child or intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978: 57). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. He also points out that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a certain time span called the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Full development during ZPD depends upon full social interaction. The range of skill that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone. It is of very fact that other people play important roles in helping children to learn, providing objects and ideas to their attention, talking while playing and sharing while playing, reading stories, asking questions. By the help of adults children can do and understand more than they can on their own. (Cameron, 2002: 5-8)

Characteristics Children

Several characteristics attached to children are that children like playing; they talk about the 'here and now'; and they

understand and retain the meaning better when they have seen some object associated with them.

Children love playing; they do like playing. It has been said that children have a natural musical taste and that play is the only activity that they take seriously. Children like playing and learn things while playing. The implication to language teaching is that games are effective ways for teaching language. By definition, a game is an activity with rules, a goal, and an element of fun. The emphasis in the use of games for language learning is on successful communication rather than on correctness on language (Hadfield 1985). Furthermore, she states that “games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as amusing activity for Saturday afternoon or for the end of term” (Hafield, 1985: 4).

Children talk about the ‘here and now’. Adults both observe and impose the cooperative principle when they talk to young children; they make what they say relevant, talk about the ‘here and now’ of the child’s world. They encourage children to take their turns and make their contributions to the conversation. They make sure that children make their contributions truthful by correcting them

(Clark and Clark, 1977: 322). This phenomenon implies that the children’s world involves around the here and now. Therefore they should not be asked to discuss abstract things or life and situation in the past or in the future. In other words, children’s interest is narrower, restricted primarily to themselves, their immediate surroundings, their families, and friends. Teaching and learning process, therefore, should give enough opportunities for them to use English in every day contexts. Children learn by doing; they learn language by using it (listening to it, speaking it, and writing it). (Palim & Power, 1990: 8)

Children understand and retain the meaning better when they have seen some objects associated with it. For this reason, the teacher should expose the students to real life situations; when this is not impossible, the visual aid can serve as a useful substitute, as pictures and their images are more vivid than words. Thus, in teaching and learning process pictures should be an integral part of every teacher’s professional equipment (Ernestova, 1988: 278).

USING NURSERY RHYMES TO TEACH ENGLISH

Saying nursery rhymes is a way of using simple, repetitive poems with a young child. They can be fun and enjoyable adult-child activities. The best nursery rhymes are those that include some type of movement or touching as they help children learn the connection between sounds and words and happenings. Teaching nursery rhymes help young children become ready to learn to read. They hear new words and the ways of making sentences from the rhymes as many rhymes contain stories that help children understand and remember a series of events. Children also start to understand that many words sound alike, they rhyme. This understanding will be a big help to children later when they start learning to spell words. In sum, learning nursery rhymes develops and improves extensive early literacy skills, such as oral Language, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, rhythm of words, and comprehension. (Bryant & Bradley, 1987) Studies have shown that there is a very strong relationship between a child's learning nursery rhymes and later success in reading and spelling. The studies also indicate that children who are familiar with a variety of nursery rhymes when they are between the ages of three and six years of age have increased literacy abilities in the

three years that follow (Bryant & Bradley, 1987).

Nursery rhyme is one medium of classroom techniques which creates amusing atmosphere. Unlike song, there is no melody to serve as a point of identification. Therefore, the modification from original rhyme should be carefully considered. As an example, consider the following rhyme and its modification as presented by Wilcox (1974).

Original Rhyme:

One, two, buckle your shoe

Modified Rhymes

One, two put, on your shoe

Three, four open, the door

Five, six, pick up sticks

Seven, eight, put them straight

Nine, ten, do it again

Other examples of rhymes are as follows:

Eeny, Meeny, Miny Mo

Eeny meeny miny mo,

Catch a tiger by the toe.

If he hollers, make him pay

Fifty dollars every day.

My mother told me to

Choose the very best one.

Punchinello

1. What can you do, Punchinello funny fellow?

What can you do, Punchinello funny you?

2. You can do it, too ...

3. You choose one of us ...

Who Stole the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?

Group: Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar?

Jimmy stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

Jimmy: Who me?

Group: Yes, you!

Jimmy: Not me!

Group: Then who?

Jimmy: Linda stole the cookies from the cookie jar.

Linda: Who me?

Group: Yes you! (And so on).

Go to bed

Go to bed late,

Stay very small.

Go to bed early,

Grow very tall.

Two big apples

Under a tree.

One is for you

And one's for me.

Rain, rain, go away!

All the children want to play.

Rain, rain, go away!

Come again another day

Acker Backer, Soda Cracker, Acker Backer

Boo!

Acker Backer, Soda Cracker

Out goes YOU!

One potato, two potatoes, three potatoes, four,

Five potatoes, six potatoes, seven potatoes, more?

One banana, two bananas, three bananas, four...

USING SONGS TO TEACH ENGLISH

Songs are part of our daily life. All people enjoy music at home, while travelling or studying, or even at work. Language teachers can use songs to open or close their lessons, to illustrate themes and topics, to present new vocabulary or recycle known language. Studies show that there is strong evidence supporting the use of music in the English language classroom; there is also a growing body of research confirming that songs are a useful tool in language acquisition. (Medina, 1993)

There are many types of songs which can be used in the classroom, ranging from nursery rhymes to contemporary pop

music. There is also a lot of music written specifically for English language teaching. Research has found that pop songs have characteristics that help learning a second language: they often contain common, short words; the language is conversational; the lyrics are often sung at a slower rate than spoken words and there is repetition of words and grammar. Furthermore, songs are also known to lower the “affective filter” or, in other words, to motivate learners to learn. (Murphy, 1992).

Songs can give positive contribution to language learning. In a world where non-native speakers of English are likely to produce the majority of songs in English, learners have the opportunity to listen to pronunciation in a wide range of varieties of the language. Songs will help learners become familiar with word stress and intonation, and the rhythm with which words are spoken or sung also helps memorization. Again, this will enable learners to remember chunks of language which they can then use in conversations or in writing. As language teachers, we can use songs to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing. (Medina, 1993)

Song is another useful medium to maintain the children’s interest and to make

the teaching and learning process enjoyable. The idea is that to select song that the children most likely hear. The good song would be the one that is familiar in children’s culture. The children will be likely to hear as they grow up because of the ‘universal nature’ of the song in this way, the children will not only learn a language but also a culture. There are a few things to keep in mind: simple, repetitive songs often contain a recurrent grammatical pattern which is useful to teach (especially with younger children). More difficult songs often contain interesting vocabulary and idioms. Also there is often a message, a theme, or a story underlying a song which students can discuss, explain, debate, and write about at almost any level. (Patsalides, 2012)

The procedures are as follows: (1) we can start with a focusing activity, anything that gets students thinking about the subject of the song. Find a picture that relates to the subject of the song and have students make guesses about it; (2) Put a selection of important words from the song on your board. Have students ask each other what the words mean. (3) Have students lip sync the song before a team of judges in a Class Idol show. This allows them to become familiar with the words, rhythm,

stress and intonation before actually singing the words out loud. (4) Cut the song into strips. Give each student one strip to memorize. (5) Have students ask each other questions about the song (about the words, about the topics or about characters in the song). (6) Have students rewrite the song as a story, write a story which began before the story in the song and led to it, or write a story which will continue after the song. (7) Change words (adjectives, adverbs, nouns - names, places or feelings), and invent new lyrics for the melody. (8) Get students to draw or collage the song and compare the visualisations in class. (Hans Mol, 2009)

When they are smart enough to compose a song (lyrics) they can use the Indonesian children popular song to sing the tune. However, they have to change the original lyrics into simple English so that they are easily memorized. In choosing the new lyrics teachers have to consider the words and structures which are in the current level of the students proficiency, or using Krashen's term the *i* level. The following is an example of a very popular children song "Mary had a little lamb". Wilcox (1974) has been creative enough to compose new lyrics for the purpose of English teaching.

The Original Lyrics:

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb

Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow.

And every where that Mary went, Mary went, Mary went

And every where that Mary went; the lamb was sure to go.

The Modified Lyrics:

Mary has a little cat, kitty cat, pretty cat

Mary has a pretty cat; the cat is eating fish

Mary has a little dog, puppy dog, pretty dog

Mary has a pretty dog; the dog is eating meat

Such lyrics might precede or follow a lesson in which the children are learning one or more of the following aspects, namely: the present tense of have, the names of domestic animals, the present progressive tense, the names of foods, the use of adjectives before nouns, the position of direct objects of verbs, and the pronunciation of particular items. What follows are other examples of songs.

London Bridge

London Bridge is falling down,

Falling down, falling down,

London Bridge is falling down,

My fair lady

Chorus: (song after each verse)

1. Take the key and lock her up...
2. Build it up with iron bars...
3. Iron bars will bend and break...
4. Build it up with silver and gold.

E. Miss Lucy Had a Baby

Miss Lucy had a baby,
His name was Tiny Tim,
She put him in the bathtub
To see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water,
He ate up all the soap,
He tried to eat the bathtub,
But it wouldn't go down his throat.

Miss Lucy called the doctor,
Miss Lucy called the nurse,
Miss Lucy called the lady
With the alligator purse.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed some basic learning principles for teaching children, especially from Piaget and Vygotsky. In addition it also presents basic characteristics of children such as children love playing, talk about the 'here and now',

and understand meaning better when they see the objects. Among of the many media of instruction suitable for teaching English to young children are rhymes and songs. Both are suitable with the characteristics of young children.

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