

SOME MEANINGFUL AND FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) is very important to do. Many benefits can be got since young learners have much potential to be developed. However, Teaching English to young learners is not easy. Most teachers feel very frustrated because they do not have experiences and knowledge how to cope with the young learners. Actually TEYL can be both a rewarding and a demanding experience if teachers do appropriate activities in the classroom. To make this experience easier, more enjoyable and meaningful for both, teachers must identify what learning a language in school requires for young children. Subsequently, teachers need to use the basic principles of teaching young learners as the bases of selecting appropriate activities as offers to the young learners. Therefore, this paper discusses young learners' needs in learning English and provides some meaningful and fun activities as choices to be implemented.

Key words: *Young learners, meaningful, fun activities, teaching English*

Young learners have much potential to be developed. One of the aspects that develop well in the early ages is a language. Brewster, Ellis, and Girad (2003, p. 1) state that most crucial age to teach a language, English especially is in the early ages of learners because young learners can learn and absorb the language more easily and better than older learner. Teaching English to young learners as demanded by the experts is not easy. It is very frustrated for some teachers to cope with them because they do not know, understand and implement the principles to teach English to them. Teaching and learning activities in younger age classroom are more than simple procedural activities. Teachers not only urge to teach but also to understand the necessity of seeing themselves as thinkers (Cambourne, Labbo, & Carpenter, 2001, p.135).

Young children learn differently from older children (Harmer, 2007). They learn from something real that they listen and see. It means that teachers cannot give something abstract to the children. They can be easily bored as well because they have an amazing ability to absorb language through play and other activities which they find enjoyable (Scott & Ytreberg, 1998). They also have an enormous capacity for finding and making fun (Halliwell, 1992, p.6). They love to play and learn best when they are enjoying themselves but they also take themselves seriously and like to think that what they are doing is a real world (Scott & Ytreberg, 1998, p.3). Therefore, Hughes (2003)

as cited in Brunello (2013) concluded that the classroom activities need to consist of real language activities to create the opportunity to interact with each other in a meaningful way.

In contrast, Fadlun (2006) revealed that in one of elementary school in her study, most teachers got confused to select appropriate methods and techniques to make pupils focus and to pay attention with teachers' explanation. She also added that teachers needed to find ways or strategies in order to help the learners reach the objectives in the most efficient and effective way. The fact shows that teachers are urged to identify young learners' needs to overcome the confusion.

Therefore, this paper will discuss more about what young learners' exactly need in learning English and will provide some meaningful and fun activities as choices to be implemented in the teaching and learning process.

YOUNG LEARNERS' CHARACTERISTICS

Young learners are between the ages of 6-10 years old. They have potential in learning English because they can absorb information from others better if they are presented in a naturalistic context (Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). Furthermore, Cameron (2001) states, "younger learners learn grammar of the L2 more slowly than older learners, so that although they start earlier with the language learning they make slower progress." It means that grammar should not be the main focus of the learning. Teachers can choose other activities or materials which improve their strength in their age such as reading and listening comprehension as well as pronunciation.

Young learners are active learners because they will try to find a meaning and activities that are presented by the teachers to them (Cameron, 2001). In addition, Scott and Ytreberg (1998) said that young learners are able to differentiate basic concepts of the world. They know the difference between fact and fiction. They will also start asking questions because they want to practice their spoken ability as well as to convey their knowledge about their basic concepts. Dealing with these characteristics, teachers need to give explanation and reason why they have to do those activities in the classroom. They will be eager to know the reasons of the day's activities.

Scott and Ytreberg (1998) also stated that young learners can decide about the activities that they like and they don't like. Therefore, teachers must be creative in

deciding what to do in the classroom by choosing some fun and meaningful activities that are appropriate in their age. If they find it interesting, they will love to study. Besides, young learners are also able to work with others and they love to learn from others (Scott & Ytreberg, 1998). So, it is a good choice for teachers to create pair or group activities because they will learn new thing from their friends.

SOME FUN AND MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Paul (2007) states, “different children are attracted by different kinds of activities. Teachers have to find out what kind of activities which can be fully developed in their class. There are some fun and meaningful ways that can be used as choices. Teachers can create activities by using games, stories and songs.

Using games

Games are fun activities to do in the class. Paul (2007) proposed two kinds of games that can be applied based on young learners’ characteristic. The first one is quite games, such as: flashcard games, dictation games, a treasure map, crosswords, draw pictures and write sentences about the pictures. Tic-tac-toe and guessing game are also other examples of silent games. These kinds of games can make them enjoy but they do not require them to move around the class. These activities are appropriate with a new class which is still learning a behavior that is acceptable or not. By using these activities, teachers can also direct young learners to focus on leaning goal. The second one is psychically active games, such as fruit basket game, and etc depending on the number of students, the size of the class, and the target lesson. These games can be a lot of fun and lead to learning as well. When young learners move around, throw around, or act around, they will more likely to remember and feel positive because they experience the games directly. These games are appropriate for the class which rules are set clearly before the lesson. Teachers just need to ensure that they are mentally and psychically involve in the activities as well as they are directed to achieve certain learning objectives.

Teachers also need to be ready when to involve with the young learners and the games as well as to step back when young learners depend on them too much. Paul (2007) proposed appropriate teachers’ roles in a game such as, (1) designing games, teachers assess what the young learners’ need to learn and design child-centered games

where teachers' lesson targets are achieved, (2) getting the pace right, teachers monitor the language target in the games to make sure that it is not too easy or too difficult, (3) answering questions, teachers should be ready with the questions, it will challenge the young learners' spoken language, (4) extending the children ability, teachers will be ready to add difficulties to make them think and learn in higher level if the game is too easy, (5) cheating creatively, teacher needs to help the weak learners' by giving clues, (6) giving all children a chance, teachers need to make sure that individual learner within a team are all enjoying themselves and getting enough chances to speak, (7) taking part, it is good to take part in the game to show how to do the correct one, or teachers can make mistakes purposely and hope it will be corrected by the learners. Whereas, teachers need to be fair and never let them depend on them.

Using stories

Cameron (2001) stated that stories can offer a whole imaginary world that children can enter and enjoy, learning as they go. Stories bring a text originated in the world outside the classroom into the classroom. These stories also introduce themes, contents, ideas, or topic which are broader than the classroom daily language learning. Stories bring a meaningful language and experience to the children. It means that stories are good materials to be used in the class. The first thing that teachers should do is choosing appropriate and qualified stories for them. A good story for teachers does not mean good for the children. Teacher should adjust the young learners' level, need, and interest.

Cameron (2001) summarize the ideal structure to be chosen as stories for the children, (1) it has an opening, (2) introduction of the characters, (3) description of the setting, (4) introduction of a problem, (5) a series of events, (6) resolution of the problem, (7) closing, and (8) a moral value. Quality stories mostly contain characters and plot that engage children and they can create a strong feeling of satisfaction when the end is reached. A good story is the one that learners enjoy and last long in their memory.

Narrative stories whether fiction or non-fiction ones are appropriate for children because these text entertain the readers. Daniel (2012, p.3) points out that "narrative is the natural way in which humans organize information." There are some famous stories from other countries which can be used by the teachers such as Little Red Riding

Hood, Mouse Deer, Nasruddin, Cinderella, Snow White, Beauty and the Best and etc. Teachers can also use famous local stories from Indonesia such as Malin Kundang, Jaka Tarup, Bawang Merang and Bawang putih, Sangkuriang, the Legend of Kemaro Island, Four Eyes and Bitter Tongue, Semesat Semesit, the Legend of Bidar Craft, and many more. It's better if teachers combine the stories from these different sources. Young learners will be happy to hear some famous stories from different places and different dimensions.

Next, teachers also need to use appropriate ways in using stories in the classroom. Using stories doesn't have to be about teaching reading. Retelling the story is the best way to introduce stories to children. Daniel (2012, p.3) also points out that "storytelling is the most immediate and fundamental means by which that narrative is communicated". By listening to a story, children are practicing listening ability for overall meaning and can also be helped to focus on detail (Cameron, 2001, p.176). Teachers' illustrations, mime and voice variations during narration also help pupils understand the story (Fojkar, Skela, & Kovac, 2013). In addition, teachers can stimulate the children to participate in the dialogue by asking some questions and they will answer it. This activity will present opportunities for communication activities which will enhance their speaking ability.

Using songs

Paul (2007) states, "most children love songs, and songs and chants are one aspect of the English class that most children learn with genuine feeling and take home with them." Encouraging singing and chanting generally endeavor to make students alert to good listening too (Maerker, 2009, p.50).

Songs can help young learners to remember things more easily and involve them more deeply. If they like the song, they will keep it in their head, sing it after class, hum it on the way home and sing them at home. Paul (2007) also explains two criteria of the song to be chosen into the class. First, the songs have catchy melodies and useful language context. These will be easier to be remembered and last longer. Second, it is important to combine action into the songs. So teachers can create their own actions or follow the actions from the songs. If teachers follow these criteria in using choosing the songs, the young learners will love the English class. The example of the songs that can be used in the class is "If You Are Happy and You Know It", "I'm a Little Teapot", "Old

McDonald”, “Twinkle-Twinkle”, “Bingo” and many more which match to the criteria. Teachers can also create or adapt their own songs, chants, and actions which are appropriate to the target lesson.

CONCLUSION

As we know that every child is different and every child is unique. Teacher can use varieties of activities to adjust these differences, for example, using quite games for the new class which hasn't set rules in the class. In contrast, physically active games can be used if the class has set the rules. Stories are another choice. Teachers can select good stories based on students' interest and level and retell the stories to them in creative ways. The last choice is using songs. Song can be more meaningful and last longer if they are combined with chants and actions. In short, if teacher adjust the young learners' characteristics to the appropriate materials and strategies, the classroom activities will be meaningful and fun for both.

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