

Dramatic Arts and Pantomime as a Unique Supplementary Methodology to Teaching English to Children under Age of 5

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Abstract. This study aims at introducing an upgraded method which is “Pantomime-Drama” and “children self-engagement in teaching process” as well as pinpointing to some shortcomings of present teaching methods and books. There has not been any real and consistent method of teaching children under age of 5. Due to some behaviors like immaturity, naughtiness, lack of responsibility, dependency, non-conformity and being in their critical period, teaching English to these children has always been very challenging. The importance of teaching to children has been overwhelmingly worked on by linguistics like Chomsky, Freeman and psychological researchers such as Salts. Various ideas were given but none could be called reliable due to the fact that they may have not considered all of these odd behaviors while teaching. This method which has particularly considered these traits is based on engaging the child in teaching as a would-be-a-teacher. According to oral polling from children and teachers and using questionnaire, both groups stated that their classes had become much more fun and interesting and specifically students insisted that they had learnt and remembered whatever was taught in the class. This study will help to improve the shortcomings of other methods and establish an approach that can be used proficiently in children English classes.

Keywords: Dramatic Arts, Pantomime, Critical Period, ESL, EFL, Children

1. Introduction

Dramatic arts have been in the center of attention due to their multi-applicable functions and mostly as a tool for conveying literature and culture. Yet, they do not wind up in drama and theatre and have recently been used in teaching English to children under age of 5 who are in the so-called Critical Period when brain starts new and better functions (Chomsky, 1998). Therefore, if teaching is not obeying a consistent and real theory and practicality, this may damage child’s learning for a life time. Finding a good method of teaching has been an issue not only in Iran, but also in some developed countries with highly developed teaching systems such as Japan, China and Canada (Shannon, 2009). As English learning has spread vastly among children in Iran these days, using a consistent method which is scientifically and theoretically approved is an obligation. Despite the numerous children classes under age of five, there is no consistent method to teach English to them due to the fact that they are totally different in nature and behavior compared to adults. Many teaching methods for children include games and fun plays. Another commonly used method in order to achieve better results is using dolls in the class to make teaching really fun (Karimi, 2002). Hence, utilizing some complementary methods can increase the practicality of teaching but the question is how well they comply with the nature of child, and goals of effective learning. “Dramatic arts and Pantomime” is a very efficacious method which is based on child’s engagement in teaching to himself as well as using dolls

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that can dramatically alleviate the concerns related to other previous methods. Since the child is directly engaged in teaching to his/her classmates, the productivity of this method is rated upmost. Children learn most of the things through playing and picturing so this method harmonizes with children's unique traits assuring a percentage of learning. In sum, teaching through playing pantomime can be quite effective because - being so much fun (Lipman 2006) - it parallels with children's nature of learning and shares all the qualities that a child needs in order to learn most effectively.

2. Methodology

The method used for this study is analytical-comparative and descriptive survey based on data from questionnaires and opinions from teachers who taught English words to the children under the age of 5 through pantomime. The main aim of this study is the child's involvement into the process of teaching to himself/herself. The study has been done on 400 children between the ages 3-5 available in two English institute in Lamerd (south of Fars Province) in which 50 of them have been under direct teaching in two English institutes and also by 8 teachers who have had teaching experience to the children over 6 years. This data was gathered through a questionnaire consisting of 20 items about teachers' satisfaction from different current methods like audio-lingual, and total physical response and also some questions related to the child's age as well as their special traits like naughtiness, playfulness, instability, and non-conformity. Then, the replies were gathered and underwent percentage analysis for each question to find out if there was any need to change some methods or if there was any difficulty and defect for the current methods. In some parts of the teaching at the classes where possible, teachers were actually briefed about the effectiveness of the method posed. When most of the teachers agreed on performance of Pantomime method; then, this was actually integrated into teaching system. Later another questionnaire was given and all the answers underwent percentage analysis. The results proved our assumption of improved learning.

2.1 Procedure

Dramatic plays and Pantomime are kind of games in which child is learning through playing a role and movements in teaching process, this will not only curb the child's boredom and augments his interest, but also expedites his learning. Statistics have shown that nearly half a dozen of teachers have more or less used Pantomime and Dramatic Plays in their classes, either consciously or unconsciously, that it is a proof for their satisfaction from this method. The notion of Pantomime and Dramatic Plays includes letting the child to teach some easy points that does not need much expertise. In this method, efforts are toward creating the least of boredom in the child, and at the same time the upmost rate of learning. At the beginning, one of the students is called up to the front of the class and repeats one of the phrases or sentences which the teacher has already written on the board. After the teacher makes sure that the student who is going to be the would-be-master for a couple of minutes has totally learnt the phrases with the best pronunciation (mistakes are corrected by the teacher), the student reads the word out and asks the other students to repeat it and plays exactly the same role as the teacher. This is continued until the teacher makes sure that all the other students have learned that word. And after the unit is covered and completed (supposedly not many words are taught in a session), some other students are called up to the front of the class by the teacher and each one takes the responsibility for one of the already taught words. He must play a role or pantomime when another student reads out a phrase like "I have long black hair, or I have a book in my bag". After the dictation and spelling of the word is written on the board and practiced once again, teacher asks them all to write it down as an assignment in their notebook. But it is also suggested to play a calm music (music is not the issue of this essay). Then it is turn to teach conversations. In the children's level, teaching conversations is along with pictures and through painting or playing, along with laughing and joking. Then each student takes a role and repeats and reads the part related to the character. Then the roles change from one to another so that not only they learn very well and with joy (as it's the best way to remove stress) but also actual communication which is the ultimate aim of learning a language is practiced and also the pronunciation and intonation of the students can be listened to and corrected if there are any mistakes.

3. Discussion

This research aims at surveying the effect of gestures and drama especially Pantomime on learning in children under age of 5. The most important issue in teaching is provision of a proper learning environment. Historically, there are three learning environments including behavioral, cognitive and structural (Mohammadi and Ghaeni 2005). To meet teachers' and students' demands, in addition to the environment attention is paid to movements and memory as new alternatives to boost up learning in classroom. In a research Salts (1981) showed that if learning is along with movements (dramatic learning), it would be so much faster and of better quality than teacher-centered teaching. The present study likewise indicates that learning along with gestures and especially pantomime will help the educational aims in three ways. Firstly, learning will be done with the least stress. Secondly, the retention of learned item will reach to its apex in the mind of the child and thirdly, remembering the concept will be faster in comparison with sedentary teacher-centered learning. Azabdaftari (1993) quoted Spinoza's Move-Thought-Growth theory: "Nurture your body to do quite a lot of jobs, this will help your mind to boost itself and reach the intellectual border of thought". Memory is a kind of ability in remembering and keeping the information so efforts must be done to boost this ability in children. Based on the theory of movement and activity, more activity and actions result in easier learning and remembering. Accordingly, it is believed that if movement and physical engagement is entered into the process of teaching to children, we are more successful in the transferring what we as teachers are supposed to. Those children who are taught based on the self-teaching and physical engagement in the pre-school levels will have easier learning and retention in the future. Self-teaching means a child plays an essential role in teaching to himself through entering in the teaching process. This improves the attention to the other students and enthusiasm for learning in the child. When he is responsible for his teaching, more possibly he will grow as a better learner due to depending on himself. This will also help the child to boost up his motivation and interest for learning and participation in class. Pantomime and Dramatic plays can be as an alternative if teachers want to have a consistent method engaging all aspects which shares and considers most of children's traits and would obviate the present learning processes. Yet there are some problems that make both teaching and learning a bit difficult and must be considered.

3.1 Books

The first issue affecting this method is the books which the constructors have not paid much attention to. Like many impractical conversations that are neither based on the situation of the classes and age, nor according to the culture of our country. For example, terms like "five black cats are standing on the wall" is too complex or "Christmas tree is in the church" that is a clash to our culture. Instead it could be written "the apple is on the desk". Therefore; a suitable book must consist of simple vocabulary as well as practical sentences like "I like to play football, I want water, I love my mother, etc." By simple and practical words, we mean those words which the child can use them inside or outside the class, home, street or back on the phone because if it gets fixed, it is going to last in the child's memory. For instance, words like "owl" and "ostrich", are not around children at all (When saying that these words are impractical, it doesn't mean that they are useless but it means that they must be entered into the books on the upper levels and not in low and primary stages of children's book because it will make them confused and disinterested in learning), but some words like "orange" and "apple" will make the confidence in the child because it is something that he faces every now and then. In sum, practicality means harmonizing the words with the child's age and environment and specially his culture. Besides impracticality, lengthy conversations need lengthy teaching which is detrimental to teaching process to children because it will make them tired, on the other hand, short and easy conversations will do better.

3.2 Teachers

Teachers at this level should remember that some conversations in children books are not consistent with the children morale and knowledge. The content of the games and the lesson must be in harmony. Forcing them to learn one conversation and do a different game does not help their learning. Teachers should also consider that evaluation should not force children to write at pre-school level. They should focus on more oral and auditory skills than writing at this level.

3.3 Acceptability of this method

As pointed out earlier, due to the low and not qualified level of English books for the children, the possibility of taking advantage of the introduced method is not so much extensive in all language skills. Therefore, most of the teachers participated and polled in the survey have used this method (Pantomime and Dramatic Play) in teaching the simple vocabulary and easy conversations. For example, unit 5 of Tiny Talk 1 A is a physical exercise that children perform some exercises, if these words are taught through easy dramatic movements and pantomime, a teacher can teach 4 words in 30 minutes to his/her student but if he/she wants to teach through the traditional audio-lingual method, it nearly takes up to 50-60 minutes to teach those 4 words. Although this method is complete per se but some teachers have considered it complementary because it needs special amenities and not many teachers have access to this kind of classes. The difficulties regarding the lack of tools and facilities can be settled through creative use of simple practical tools. A way with high practicality and with multiple usages is finger dolls that could be so helpful. Another alternative is utilizing talent and creativity of both the children and teachers. For instance, for teaching the word “train”, several students can be aligned in row while they are taking the front person’s back and teacher can ask them to make the sound of the train and move a bit backward and forward and ask the other students to guess what it is. Then, all together they repeat the word or one of the students who is responsible for teaching that word asks the others to repeat. Like this we can inculcate the word in no time and without much trouble. In this case, not only the students who are acting are engaged but also those who are guessing the word. So as we can see, directly and indirectly all the class is involved in an interesting process of learning.

3.4 Children’s special behavioral traits

Another problem might be keeping the children sit down in the class for a while. Regarding their special creativity and curiosity, the way of sitting in the class must be a bit different with other classes. So teachers can’t make them to sit like the adults on wooden chairs and due to their dependency on their parents which is so rampant in this age range, it is suggested to let the parents to come along in the class and sit beside them. There lay some benefits. Firstly, the parents would see how well their children are performing in the class and would help them to practice with them properly at home. Secondly, the parents’ presence in the class gives a kind of confidence and peace of mind to the children and they can learn with less stress and tension and thirdly, parents can help the teachers to perform pantomimes and dramatic plays. Besides, the parent’s recognition of their children’s special taste and temperament can help to settle their children in the best way. Although some teachers had different ideas, the suggestion was supported by nearly all in general and called their presence so effective. Another suggestion to consider is that teachers should speak Farsi when asking a child about what drama has been played because some of them still have difficulty understanding and pronouncing the words. Then asking them to paint the word related to the play would be the best substitution due to the facts that 1. They enjoy painting and drawing more than a conversation and 2. Stress is so much less, and when teaching is with less stress, learning will sure be with higher quality and 3. The creativity will increase and we can also teach them the colors and dictation through painting words with different colors.

3.5 Reviewing the previous unit each session

Reviewing is the best way to make sure if they have learned but through asking them to perform and paint, not through pushing them to remember and say by rote. In the polling, the majority of the teachers have agreed and shown their satisfaction from this method in the class, and have called it quite efficacious. Now, if the books are revised then the grounds will be paved for performing it every session.

4. Conclusion

Teaching to children has always been a difficult and sensitive task due to specific individual traits, brain functions and natural behavior like naughtiness, and incapability of some teachers to sit them down for whole class time. The present teaching methods are either based on pure theories without any philosophy behind it or in general are impractical for children. The method that has been introduced here is through using “Pantomime and Dramatic arts” i.e. playing a lot of roles whenever there is a conversation or something in the book that can be roll-played but through a well-off technique. A child will be in role of a

teacher which has some advantages. First due to making a different atmosphere by giving teaching responsibility to a child, they are psychologically engaged that saves a unique picture of that session; subsequently a long-lasting learning and better retention (Freeman L., 2000). Second, when the class slips from the teacher-centered to student-centered, normally students and specially children unbelievably like it and subsequently enjoy the class with less stress (Freeman L., 2000). One of the current methods of teaching English to children regarding drama is using the finger dolls to make both teaching and the class interesting which is a common and balanced way but it has limited applications that is, teacher cannot teach all concepts with a finger doll. Hence, it is suggested to use the complimentary method of Pantomime and Dramatic Games that is mostly according to child's engagement in teaching process and playing roles. Using this method has had many satisfactory and agreeable consequences in long-term learning of the children. Being able to teach a wider range of words and terms with much higher assurance of guaranteed learning is the unique feature of this method. Based on our findings of actual use of this method in some classes, children's satisfaction, cooperation in learning, interest, activity and above all enthusiasm to learn boosted up dramatically which heralds a suitable method that meets children's demands from teacher, class and themselves. The method in practice revealed that even those children who didn't feel like sitting in the class would become active in the self-teaching process. According to our observation of the classes, not only the children learned well and didn't request teacher to finish the class sooner, but also they better remembered what had been taught before. While the authors well recognize the limitation of this study regarding scope and time, they express their hope that this research will inspire a more comprehensive research on the use of "Pantomime and Drama" that can improve learning among all the children under the age of 5.

5. Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deep thanks to Dr. Hashemi and Dr. Sohrab Abdollahi for their invaluable ideas, consistent encouragement and meticulous reviews.

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