

How I made my Students Speak English Better

English has become the common man's language. Being a language of employability a good command over it is a unique qualification to keep an edge over the others. A mind compact with sturdy and solid English elements can communicate effectively. The process of imparting the communication skills of this universal language would be efficient along with a frivolous touch.

“Learn to speak in English”, ‘Talk only in English’ are torturing, clichéd ring tones that have lost their connotation in today's classrooms. The majority of responses have always been “uh”. There were many methods I adopted but this really worked.

I believe that there should be a kind of suspense in teaching the spoken form of English in our classrooms. It should contain the interest of the students as if they are on a treasure hunt. They should be lead through mazes of experience kindling the fire to unearth a mysterious possession. The teacher should not unravel the mystery. The students need to unwrap them.

To speak plainly the efforts taken by the teacher to install this language of communication in their systems should not be obvious. Students who have become so used to the phrase ‘language games’ sometimes play low. So I wanted to derive methods that would interest, interpret and inculcate the language in the mindset of the students.

Dance, Drama and Music

Drama, Dance and Music have never lost their charm. This became my tool to discover certain methodologies, which I wish to call ‘**Fine arts in the teaching of Language**’. Every student is talented or at least interested in Fine Arts. I divided the whole class into 3 groups based on their preferences and interest in Dance, Drama and Music.

The ice breaking session involved the students to christen their groups. (They spelled out umpteenth names, some funny, some meaningful). It's important to note that allowing the students to be themselves with a given set of regulations is the first step to learning. Finally there emerged the Dancing Queens from the dancers side, Raaga Malika for music and Monoliza for Dramatics/painting. Freedom in choosing broke the ice and learning was initiated.

Any prose or lesson in an English classroom is targeted to teach the language. An explanation of a piece of writing is a mere introduction. Only when learning with involvement takes place is the process complete. After each lesson we fixed an enactment

hour. For example, love is the quintessence of the lesson 'Lover's Reunion' by D.H.Spencer.

The Raaga Maliga's created a song based on the theme and characters. They were divided into two sides, one group sang the song and the other performed an action song. Finally the whole class joined the chorus. At the end of the song students had to say at least one sentence in relation to their performance.

The Dancing Queens composed a choreography where the students took turns to explain a parallel situation and dancers exhibited their talents. The Monaliza group enacted the prose piece. They even made a collage on the main theme, which was presented and open to questions and suggestion. This enabled interaction. At the end of the enactment hour every student would have participated, performed and spoken which would have never happened in a passive listening session.

Dumb charades

Phrases were taught through Dumb charades. Dumb charades is a game where the topic is selected. A volunteer mimes a phrase and the students identify and try to give a suitable sentence. This enables prior preparation and imprints the phrases on the long-term memory.

The Debate chair

In order to make the students react to social issues and express their responses in English The Debate Chair was experimented. Out of the 3 groups two would decide on for and against the topics and the third group would be on the judgment chair.

Tête-à-tête

Students were encouraged to have short conversations about the day-to-day activities. Casual conversations and situational dialogues helped them to imbibe the kind of sentences that they would need to interact daily.

Descriptive Talking

Talking about friends lightens up students' spirits. Each student would come forward and describe a person's physical appearance and should add a complimentary sentence about her and the class is left to identify the girl.

The students were also randomly selected to describe any thing that they saw. (The classroom, things found, the climate outside e.t.c)

In all my experiments the following were on my mind.

1. To add variety – Students are literally starving for expressions. Asking them again and again to speak in English is a hackneyed approach. Introducing them to myriad ways of acquiring the language is effective.
2. Participative- Each and every student's participation is important. Encouraging them to come forward and frequently inviting them to face their own classmates with ease is a redeeming exercise.
3. Remedial Measures- I had to be patient to observe and reserve corrections and bring it to the notice of each and every student much later. An intervening correction puts a speed breaker or stops her from moving further. Peer group response is a determining factor in an introvert student. I made my students aware of the dangers of negative comments and remarks, which helped them to help the struggling student to outgrow her hurdles. Visual impact, fun activities, mild suggestions, active involvement, creativity and expressing oneself have to be taken care of in encouraging the students to master this language.

Fine Arts and English are languages of expression. There are no hard and fast rules to reserve English for the classroom and Fine Arts for the stage. A proportionate combination of the two from time to time activates interests, increases participation and paralyses silence. Fine Arts make even the coyest student react. With committed encouragement and pace learning the teacher can capitalize on it. A teacher must be a facilitator. The vibration of the class creates a perfect ambience. In a competitive environment, pairing streams is a common venture. If Fine Arts and English could go together, expression then becomes much easier.

M.Mary Jayanthi
Lecturer
Dept. of English
Holy Cross College
Trichy (India)