

Telling Stories Through Creative Movement - An Approach in Language Learning

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Telling stories is an everyday affair. Pupils come to school with stories to tell their friends - what they did yesterday, what their parents told them and what they saw on television.

Teachers should exploit this in helping students to acquire language. Vocabulary can be expanded if the lesson is properly planned. Thinking skills can be practised and oral fluency enhanced when a consistent effort is made to enhance pupils' story telling skills.

Some teachers use books as take off points in using stories in the classroom. As a variation, creative movement in Physical Education could be brought into the language classroom and used as a stimulus for story telling. After all, it is about time we make inter-disciplinary efforts to promote better learning.

Creative Movement In Physical Education

The term "Movement" can mean different things in different contexts. Movement can include aspects of education beyond traditional sports, games, gymnastics and dance. Every movement has a Time element; it takes place in Space; it also has Weight, Flow and Body elements. Creative movement helps a pupil take instructions from the teacher - to listen, think and solve movement problems in each pupil's own unique way. Here they are not forced to carry out activities that they are not ready to perform. The teacher has to create an environment such that students would learn to think for themselves and use their own ideas in the movement experiences.

How Stories Can Be Created Through Creative Movement

Teachers can guide students in creating stories by taking into consideration the five elements mentioned earlier.

1. The Weight Factor

This can be referred to as qualities of movement. Students can express force such as punching,

pressing, kicking as contrasted with smooth gentle movements like gliding and floating. Besides, while doing the movements, they can express feelings of happiness, sadness, etc. In this way they can imitate movements of animals, personalities and fictitious characters.

2. The Time Factor

Every movement takes time. Whether it requires a short or long time depends on whether one moves quickly or slowly. Students can perform movements like walking very slowly, walking quickly and there could be variations in rhythm like sudden, jerky or smooth movements.

3. The Space Factor

The large area of space surrounding the body is personal space. Students can reach out as far as their hands can go without moving their feet. They can explore the whole area of the room - move in different directions - forwards, backwards, sideways, upwards, downwards and diagonally.

Movements too can be done at different levels - stretching high in the air, balancing and bending forward and moving low on the floor.

4. The Flow Factor

Flow refers to the transition of the body from one position to another. Students would be able to perform movements in a sequence such as walking, running, skipping, crawling and gliding in a sequence that shows good control and balance. Bound flow or interrupted flow is stopping at the end of a movement or part of a movement whereas free flow or sustained flow is linking together different movements or parts of a movement.

5. The Body Factor

Students can perform body shapes like bending, stretching and curling. Different parts of the body are able to support the weight of the body. An example is balancing on one foot, moving on hands and feet, moving on elbows and knees and balancing on one hand and one foot.

Variations can be made by adding music. Thackray (1965) in "Music and Physical Education" describes ways of choosing a piece of music out of which movements can be developed. One way is to make music the dominant element and the movement depends entirely on it. The other way is to work out a series of movements first and then try to find a suitable piece of music to fit in. Students will be more motivated to do physical activities to the accompaniment of music.

Movements such as the ones described above, properly organized, can help sharpen the students' skills cognitively, physically and affectively besides polishing the psychomotor aspects. However if creative movement is incorporated into the language classroom, it would help make the tedious job of learning a second language more fun. Here the students are kept alert as they are actively involved physically as well as mentally as they create their "stories". Furthermore, with music in the air, the students can be "free" to create their stories and devise ways of expressing themselves in movements. This allows for the students' involvement physically, mentally, as well as linguistically. Below are two sample lessons for teachers to use.

Lesson Plan A

Level: Ages 9 to 11 high ability

Aims:

1. Linguistic
 - a. To practise the vocabulary of "weights".
 - b. To use words associated with "weights".
2. Cognitive
 - a. To practise adventurous thinking
 - b. To group certain words of "movement" used during the exercise.
3. Affective
 - a. To work cooperatively in groups
 - b. To have tolerance for others
 - c. To appreciate individual differences.

Procedure

1. Play soft music.
2. Tell students that in the centre of the classroom (push chairs and desks to the walls) is a huge tree. On the branches of the tree are hung some presents. Each student is to pluck one present from the tree.
3. Ask students to slowly open the presents.
4. Ask them to show their reaction when they see the present. They can do anything they like with it. They could play with it, throw it, swing it, move on it, pull it, etc. (as long as they stretch their arms or legs).
5. Now ask them to put the present back into the box. This time they are to imagine that the lid cannot be closed. Show their action. They are to use all their strength. (When pressing down they are not supposed to bend their back, instead they are to kneel down). Encourage them to tell their classmates what they are feeling.
6. Ask them to continue talking, and also show any movement they like, guided by the fact that the box is now very heavy.
7. After five minutes ask them to stop. They then get into groups of five. Each student takes his turn to relate what he did.
8. Once they have finished the group work the teacher leads further discussion by asking for words they had used in their stories that are associated with heavy objects, for example heavy, strong, push, etc.

Note:

The lesson can be extended by asking students to write their stories as homework. They would then also practise using the past tense.

The above lesson exemplifies a lesson that uses the five elements of movement - weight, time, space, flow and body.

The weight factor was involved during the activity of plucking the present from the tree. They would have had to LIFT and TUG the present if it was heavy. On the other hand they would only have had to PLUCK the present off the tree if the present was light. As far as the time factor was concerned, they would have had to pull SLOWLY if the present had been heavy and QUICKLY if the present had been light.

When they were moving around with the present, the SPACE factor was involved. The FLOW of movement was the underlying element throughout. The BODY element was involved all the time, as was LANGUAGE.

Lesson Plan B

Level: Ages 9 to 11 high ability group

Aims:

1. Linguistic
 - a. To practise using the following words - pluck, flick, bend forwards, backwards sideways, etc.
 - b. To practise using the present tense.
2. Cognitive
 - a. To practise adventurous thinking.
 - b. To practise making associations.
3. Affective
 - a. To work cooperatively in groups.
 - b. To have tolerance for others.
 - c. To appreciate individual differences.

Procedure

1. Tell the students that they are in a garden full of flowers. They are very happy. They take a basket and start plucking flowers. The teacher gives them instructions on what to do and where to move, thus allowing for listening practice.
2. Suddenly they spot a beautiful butterfly. They move like the butterfly - swinging their arms from side to side -stretching and bending as they move.
3. Now they continue the story by imagining that they come across other animals that may be found in the garden, such as a bird. They are also to relate what they do with these animals, like stroking the bird, trying to catch a rabbit or trying to avoid a snake.
4. Ask five students to volunteer telling their stories in front of the whole group - doing the movements at the same time. They are to use the present tense.

Note: As a follow up activity pupils could be asked to:

- a. Write their stories and compile them as a collection of short stories by the class.
- b. Write dialogues based on the stories.
- c. Write the stories in either present, future, or past time.
- d. Work in pairs - one student writes the story while the other works on the illustrations.

- e. Think of interesting titles for the stories.

Conclusion

Teachers can use these activities and explore possibilities of even more tasks. They could think of ways to extend these activities by adding to the lists of objectives. Students may also create all kinds of stories by experimenting with other movements based on the other elements mentioned. Furthermore, adaptations may be made using any grouping of the five elements.

It should be pointed out that teachers need no previous training in movement activities. They only need to arm themselves with enthusiasm and a little bit of courage and of course some creative effort. Their role is to guide students in exploring, experimenting and discovering ways of expressing themselves.

Through,, sharing stories with others, students develop positive self concepts and learn to be more tolerant of others and appreciate their differences.

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