

Learning by Doing — A Method of Teaching Careful Reading in English at the Primary Level

LIEW SAU PHENG

There is nothing new about this whole idea of Learning by Doing. As a method of teaching English it was used in the days when English was taught as a first language. In a typical lesson on Learning by Doing students were asked to follow a set of written instructions in order to make a certain object or carry out a specific task. It was easy in such a case for the teacher to check whether a student had fully understood the written instructions he was given just by

looking at the finished product or the completed task. This kind of lesson leaves the student with a strong sense of achievement. Without the help of a teacher he has been able to study the given instructions and come up with a product he has made following that set of instructions. Such a method used is more meaningful as an exercise for teaching reading than the traditional exercise for reading comprehension.

It is about time that the language teacher does something to break the monotony of learning English. In the present structural syllabus for the Primary and Lower Secondary, no provision is made for the teaching of reading except reading aloud. It may not be possible at the primary level to get children interested in even the most simple of English readers because they do not have a sufficient vocabulary to cope with such reading. But it is highly feasible for them to cope with the reading of simple sets of instructions which will result in the creation of a simple object or the completion of an interesting task.

A field which offers a wide scope for meaningful and interesting reading at the primary level is origami — the art of paper folding. This kind of activity never fails to arouse the interest of children. Such activities are best carried out in groups of preferably 4 children. Each member of a group receives the same set of instructions, but members of the group need to help one another in an attempt to understand the instructions. These instructions need to be broken down into very simple steps. Whenever a word which may pose difficulty in understanding is used then a simple graphic illustration can be given. It is important that the instructions and the task used for these activities move from the simple to the more difficult in very gradual steps. As an introduction to a lesson of this nature the teacher should start off with a simple paper folding activity in which she gets the whole class to participate. The instructions should be preferably taped so that the teacher can stop the tape after each step to check whether the children understand what they are asked to do. Difficult words to be used in the lesson paper will be incorporated into this introductory activity so that the children will not get bogged down by them when they start on the paper folding activity on their own. The teacher should make certain preliminaries very clear to the children before they begin. For example each child must go through the set of instructions and try to understand for himself what he must do. If one of them feels he has fully understood he may volunteer to be the instructor for that activity. He then reads the instructions step by step and checks on the others to see

whether they are doing the correct thing. The other members are allowed to challenge the instructor if they feel that he is misguiding them. But only in cases where the children find that they cannot resolve the issue themselves will the teacher step in to clarify.

The teacher is relieved from active teaching to walk round the classroom to check on the reading aloud as well as the understanding of the given set of instructions. This kind of activity has the added advantage of making the children responsible for their own learning. What is more important they will have something to show for their efforts in learning English! And there is no reason why structures learned in the usual English reading period cannot be reinforced by incorporating them into the set of instructions.

If a teacher feels that it will be difficult get any child to volunteer to be instructor for an activity then he must make sure that each member of the group has a turn at the job of being an instructor. Any instructor who needs help from the supervisor (the teacher) has merely to put up his hand.

A lesson which is activity-based and creative is bound to be highly motivating and stimulating. The learning in groups with the child as the instructor is more effective than the common practice employed by the majority of teachers is teaching by merely talking. (It will be a move away from trivial activities unrelated to children's creative language production).

Here are two paper-folding activities in which the language used is simple. With weak students the teachers may have to pick out what she considers difficult items of vocabulary and teach these by demonstration at the beginning of each activity. This will help the smooth flow of the lesson.

The Drinking Cup

This is an easy toy to make for your little brother or sister when you are at home. But just think how practical it can be if you are on a hike and have forgotten to bring a cup with you. All you have to do is pull a sheet of paper from an exercise book and make one. It's really quite simple. This is how you do it.

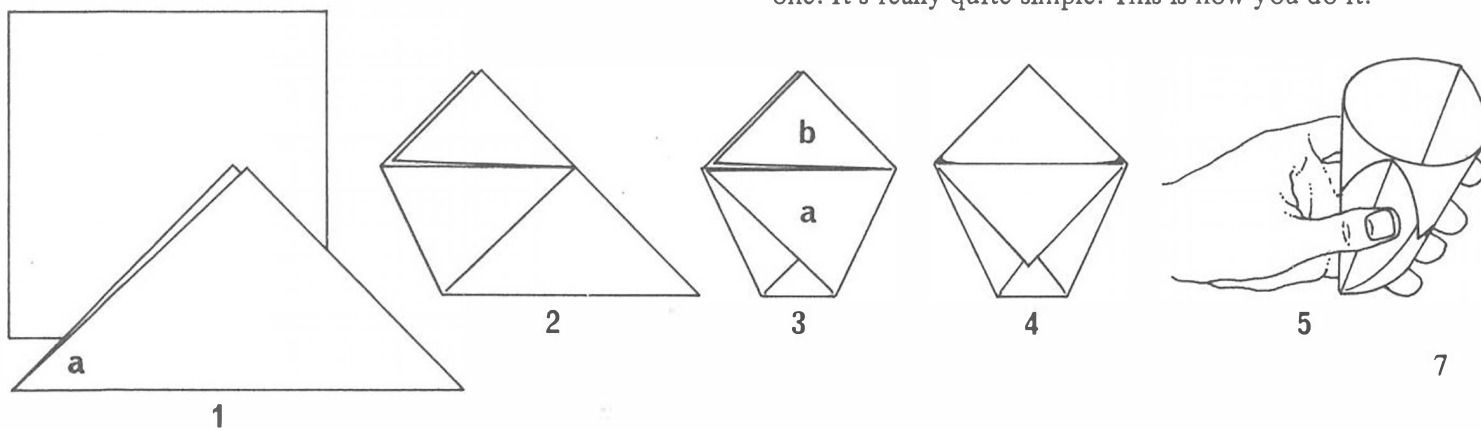


Figure 1: First fold a square piece of paper diagonally once.

Figure 2: Now fold the left corner, then the right corner.

Figure 3: It will look like this.

Figure 4: There are two points at the top. Fold a forward and back, and your drinking cup is completed.

Figure 5: Open the cup and it is ready for use.

The Magic Beak

Here is another interesting thing to make. It is called the Magic Beak. Take a square piece of paper about 5" to a side.

Figure 1: First fold the paper in half in both directions. Open the sheet and lay it out flat.

Figure 2: Fold the four corners towards the middle.

Figure 3: Turn the whole thing over and again the four corners toward the middle.

Figure 4: Turn over the resulting piece and fold it in half in both directions, opening it again each time. Press the creases firmly so that the remaining steps will be easier.

Now push two fingers under a and b to form two little pockets. Then do the same with c and d. If the bottom pops out, tuck it back in.

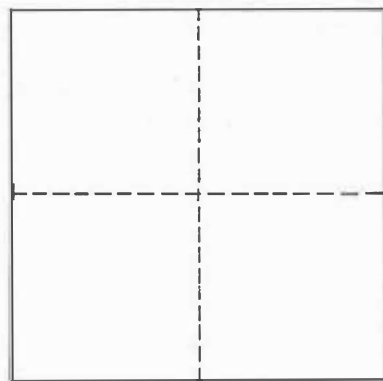
Figure 5: Shows the resulting figure when it is turned over.

If the figure doesn't work out right the first time, hold one corner of the figure and push the tip of your finger under the flap. The point which forms will show you right away how all the others should be.

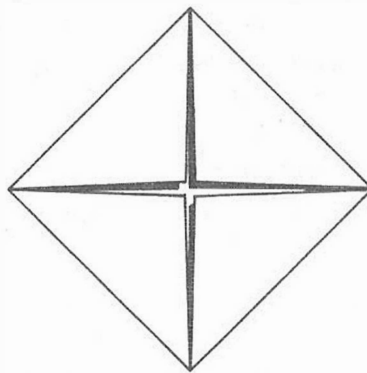
You can also play a game with the Magic Beak, this is how you do it.

Figure 6: Insert the index finger and thumb of your left hand (e and f) into the pockets a and c, while the same fingers on your right hand go into pockets b and d. The beak — a double beak — can be opened up and down or across; it depends on how you open and close your fingers.

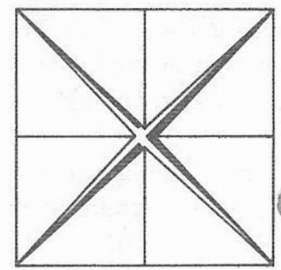
You can make the magic beak from coloured paper, or make it somewhat larger than described here. Or, better yet, use white paper, and then paint it. Paint two opposite inner surfaces red and the other two blue. Then it will seem as if the inside of the beak changes colour as you open and close it.



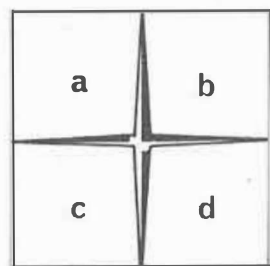
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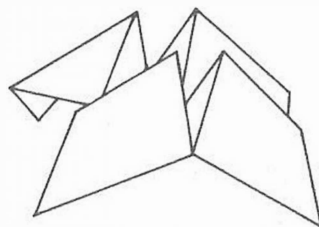
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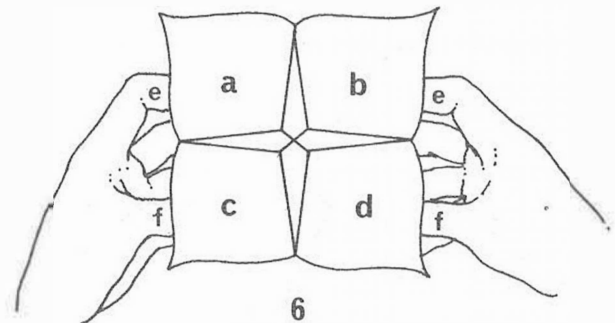
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