

Oral English in the Primary School

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We often say that our pupils cannot speak or write English correctly. Have we paused to consider why? We have oral English lessons almost every day, but the pupils get very little opportunity to speak in these lessons. Very often, probably due to lack of discipline, we tell our pupils to 'Keep quiet and listen'. We proceed to give a series of instructions on how a particular structure is used and then spend the next thirty minutes asking the pupils to read sentences round the class. Most pupils have difficulty reading the sentences and the sentences themselves have no interest value for them. Reading is important but it should not take the place of speech. Good speech is the foundation for good writing. Is it possible for a child who says, 'I am going to school' to write 'I go school'? If the pupils make good progress in their speech, their written work will also improve.

Our aim in the primary school should be to enable our pupils to communicate in clear and simple sentences. Pupils should get practice in listening to good speech and in reproducing what they hear in their own speech. There are pupils for whom English is a second language and others for whom English is a third language. We cannot expect our pupils, at the end of the sixth year, to have achieved the same standard of proficiency in Bahasa

Malaysia, English and their mother tongue. Neither the teacher nor his pupils will be using English in any other subject, and as the time for English is limited, we should devote most of the time available to increasing the powers of speech of our pupils.

In any learning situation, unless the interest of the pupils is captured and held, very little learning takes place. It is up to us as teachers to find ways and means of getting the pupils not only to be interested in the oral English lessons, but to look forward to each lesson and to want to use the language at every opportunity they get. Are our pupils eager to talk and answer questions or do they sit anxiously hoping that their teacher will not notice them? Every teacher knows that pupil participation is important in any learning situation, but how much of this do we see in an English lesson? Are our lessons planned in such a way as to encourage our pupils to take an active part? If we do not encourage our pupils to speak during the English lessons, when will they get an opportunity to use the language? Is it any wonder that they speak in their mother tongue at every opportunity they get to talk to one another?

Pupils forget easily if the learning is mechanical.

Therefore speech must be practised in situations which occur naturally or are created by the teacher. Every unit must be thoroughly mastered by the pupils. They should understand what they learn, and know when and how to use what they have learnt. They should be given opportunities to practise what they have learnt in many different situations. This cannot always be done in one lesson. Some units may require more practice than others, but the interest of the pupils must be kept alive by using different situations and methods of practice.

The units for Standards One and Two are such that there should be no difficulty presenting them with active participation by the pupils. There are numerous classroom situations which are appropriate for the learning of these units. Teachers of Standards Four to Six may have some difficulty finding suitable classroom situations, but it should not be too difficult for them to create situations which will interest their pupils.

Let us take Unit 172 (a) (new syllabus) 'afraid of' + noun.

- i The teacher could tell a very short story like this: Ali and his brother went for a swim. They walked to the river near Ah Chong's house. On the way, a small dog barked at them. Ali was not afraid of the small dog. His brother Ahmad was. He walked behind Ali. Their friend Ah Chong was swimming in the river. Ah Kow and his dog were sitting under a tree. Ah Kow did not want to swim. He was afraid of crocodiles. Ah Kow's dog was big and fierce. Ali and Ahmad were afraid of Ah Kow's dog.
- ii Examples of questions by the teacher:—
Who was afraid of crocodiles? (Ah Kow was.)
Who wasn't afraid of the small dog? (Ali wasn't.)
Was Ah Kow afraid of the water? (No, he wasn't.)

What was Ali afraid of? (He was afraid of Ah Kow's dog.)

- iii The pupils could then ask each other the same questions.
- iv To vary the lesson, the teacher could ask his pupils to tell him what they, their brothers, sisters or friends were afraid of. He could start off by telling his pupils what he was afraid of and then write on the board some of the things his pupils are afraid of.
- v A short quiz could follow based on the information recorded on the board. The teacher says, 'Guess what I am afraid of. They live on trees and in the ground. They do not have legs.' The pupils ask questions requiring 'Yes' or 'No' answers like 'Do they bite? Do they eat grass? Do they eat small animals?' and then someone would guess, 'You are afraid of snakes.' Various pupils could take the part of the teacher, but this activity should not take more than five or ten minutes.
- vi When the pupils say what they are afraid of, the teacher could write the information on the board like this:—
Ali — ghosts
Ali's sister — rats
Ah Chong — tigers
Ah Kow — crocodiles

The teacher could ask questions followed by the pupils asking each other questions like this:

- What is Ali afraid of?
Who is afraid of crocodiles?
Is Ah Chong afraid of rats?
Is Ah Chong afraid of rats or tigers?

The imaginative and enterprising teacher will also make use of wall charts, puppets, games, poems, conversations and other aids and activities to make each lesson enjoyable and meaningful for his pupils.