

NOTES TO THE TEACHER

As a respected member of the teaching community, you know how important it is for your pupils to learn English well. We hope, you also realize that you are the person who can help them most in their effort to learn English well. We urge upon you to think about this great responsibility and adopt an **'activity-based, child-centred'** approach to learning.

Why 'activity-based' ? Because language learners learn by performing tasks which require the use of language, e.g. listening to a talk, telling a story, reading a poem or a book, writing a letter, etc.

Why 'child-centred' ? Because it is the child, and not the teacher, who should be more active in the classroom. The teacher's job is to guide and help the child in carrying out language-learning activities. The needs and interests of the child must determine *what* is being taught and *how* it is being taught.

Language input and interaction

Two conditions must be fulfilled if we want a child to learn a language. The first condition is that the child must be given enough **'language input'**. The child must be exposed to language. This exposure comes through Listening and Reading.

When a baby is only a few months old, it begins to learn its mother-tongue without the help of any teacher, by simply **listening** to others. At this stage, the baby cannot speak, read or write. But it can listen. Listening enables the child to comprehend (understand) what is being said, and once comprehension

has developed, the other language skills follow. By listening, the child learns new words as well as the rules for forming sentences, although it does not receive grammar lessons in the mother tongue from anyone.

In its second year, the child begins to **speak**. At first it utters only isolated words, such as “mummy” or “papa” ; then it starts using ‘sentence fragments’ – that is, ‘broken’ or incomplete sentences, such as “Baby eat” (meaning “I want to eat”). Finally, by the age of 3 to 4 years, the child can speak complete sentences in the mother tongue, without making grammatical mistakes. The child has mastered the spoken language , though it still cannot read and write. It learns to read or write, usually with the help of a teacher at school, only after it has mastered the spoken language. Listening and Speaking come first ; Reading and Writing follow.

A child who has never been exposed to a language in its spoken form will not be able to learn the language effectively. Children with hearing problems are unable to speak for a long time and need special language training. In some families, parents spend a lot of time in talking to their children, while in some other families there is much less communication between parents and children. Children who come from families in which there is a lot of parent-child interaction generally learn language faster than children from non-communicating families.

Listening is the main source of language input at the earlier stages, but at a later stage, Reading becomes the most important source of input. The more a child reads, the faster it will learn the language.

The teacher should therefore understand, that the children whom he/she is teaching need a lot of **language input**, which comes through Listening and Reading. It is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the children are doing enough listening and reading in English.

The second condition for successful language learning is **interaction**. Children need to *interact* with others through language. We know the saying : “Practice makes a man perfect”. The child has to *practise* using the language which it is learning. Input and interaction often go together. Mothers who communicate with their children are providing input as well as opportunities for interaction. They speak to their children, but they also allow their children to speak. On the other hand, a teacher who talks all the time in the classroom but does not allow the children to talk is providing a lot of input, but no interaction. The children in such a classroom will not learn the language well.

‘Activity-based’ teaching is interactive teaching. The children who are learning English must be given plenty of opportunities to *use* the language in the classroom, in ways which they find interesting. In many classes, teachers spend a lot of time in different kinds of ‘language drill’. Children are made to memorize words and to repeat sentences endlessly, without much attention to meaning. This kind of mechanical drill is not productive. The language activity provided in the classroom must be *meaningful* to children. They should be allowed to express their own ideas and feelings and talk about their own experiences.

Group-work

Classroom teaching can become more interactive if teachers make use of **group-work**. It is difficult for a teacher to interact with every child in a class of 40, but if the class is divided (for example) into 8 groups of 5 each, children can interact with each other when they are performing a language activity. The members of a group should be sitting in a circle, facing each other. Each group is given a task to perform. While doing this task, the children in a group co-operate with each other. But there is also competition between groups, which helps the process of language learning.

The textbook

The language textbook should provide rich and interesting input (through Listening and Reading activities) as well as create opportunities for meaningful interaction (through Speaking and Writing activities). But the textbook cannot do anything by itself : it needs to be brought to life by the teacher.

The Class 6 textbook

This book contains a number of 'texts', in prose as well as poetry, which have been carefully selected for children of Class 6. It is these texts which will mainly provide language input to children. The texts are followed by a large number of activities, which allow interaction to take place. This text book has 16 lessons.

It is difficult to give a child sufficient language input through a single textbook of about a hundred pages. But that is all we may have time for in the English Classes. Children have to be taught many different subjects. They need to read many textbooks, and we have to be careful not to burden them.

Materials for listening and speaking practice

A printed textbook can be very helpful in providing practice in reading and writing, but it may not be equally helpful in providing practice in listening and speaking. Children need exposure to the *spoken* form of the language as well as the *written* form. Exposure to Spoken English can be best provided through audio-visual materials. Children need to do a lot of listening, and not just to their teacher.

Teachers' Manual

Teachers' Manuals are often provided to guide teachers in teaching a new textbook. However, it is often found that these Manuals do not reach the teachers, in time.

In this book, notes for teachers have been built into the Activities which children are required to complete with the help of their teachers. Each lesson is presented as a kind of 'lesson plan', addressed to the teacher as well as the pupils.

The Structure of a Lesson

Each lesson is divided into 3 stages, and a number of activities have been provided in each stage.

Stage 1. Pre-reading

The first is the **Pre-reading stage**, during which children are encouraged to think about and talk about the topic of the lesson, and to review all that they know on this topic. It has been found that in order to understand a text properly, a reader needs to make use of the 'background knowledge' which he/she possesses on the subject matter of the text. The Pre-reading stage thus becomes a preparation for the activity of reading.

1.(a) Listening

As you know, language input is provided, at the earlier stages, mainly through listening. Children need plenty of practice in listening before they can become efficient readers.

Therefore, as a part of pre-reading activity, teachers should read out the texts (aloud) and make the children listen, so that they can form an over-all impression of the text which they are going to read. Listening is emphasized,

particularly for the teaching of the poems in this textbook, since poetry is meant primarily to be heard.

After the teacher has read out the text to the children, he/she should ask a few questions to test how much of the text has been understood through listening.

1.(b) Reading in chorus

The teacher's reading of the text should be followed by 'chorus reading'. The teacher should first read out a small portion of the text (which may be a single sentence or a part of a sentence), and this reading should be followed immediately by a 'chorus' of all the children reading together, in imitation of the model provided by the teacher. This helps the children to develop fluency in reading as well as speaking, and it is better than asking them to read out parts of the text individually.

It must be remembered, however, that reading in chorus is meant to be only a preparation for the activity of reading *silently*. Reading means, essentially, silent reading for understanding.

Stage 2. Reading

Pre-reading activity is followed by **Reading**. It is wrong to assume that pupils are not capable of reading and understanding a text without the teacher's explanations. This wrong idea leads the teacher to read and *explain* the texts to the students, sometimes providing explanations in the mother-tongue. Children will never develop the skills of reading if teachers continue to explain the texts to them.

2.(a). Introducing unfamiliar words before reading begins

Children often find it difficult to read and understand a text because it contains too many words whose meanings they do not know. Each unknown

word blocks their understanding of the text. The teacher should remove at least some of these blocks, so that children can progress through the text. We recommend, therefore, that the meanings of those words which are likely to present difficulties to children be explained in advance, before they start reading. In this book, the meanings of 'key words' have been 'glossed' (explained) in advance, which may be useful to the teacher.

Teachers often translate unfamiliar English words into the mother-tongue to help children understand their meaning. This can be a useful 'short-cut', but it is not recommended for two reasons.

Firstly, a translation of a word can often be misleading because English words may not have exact equivalents in the mother-tongue. Secondly, if an English word is translated into the mother-tongue, it does not become a part of the child's vocabulary. It is the mother-tongue equivalent that remains in the child's memory.

The best way of introducing a new word is to provide simple and clear contexts for the use of that word, so that the child can easily guess its meaning from the context. For example, the word 'pretend' can be introduced through the following context :

Mohan did not want to go to school yesterday. He wanted to stay at home and play with his little sister. So he pretended to be sick, although he was not sick. He told his mother " Mother, I have a bad head-ache." His mother believed him and told him not to go to school.

2(b). Silent Reading and Reading Aloud.

Children should be trained to read fast, but with understanding. This is possible only when they read **silently**, making the mental effort to understand what the text is about. When children are made to read a text 'aloud', the speed

of reading is reduced. Also, during the process of reading aloud, their attention is likely to be more on the *sounds* of the words than on their meanings.

Teachers often make children read texts aloud because they think this will help them to develop good pronunciation and to speak fluently. Speaking and Reading are two different skills, which should be taught through separate activities. During the activity of reading, the attention of the children should be focused on meaning alone – not on the sounds of the words which they are reading.

We recommend, therefore, that during the Reading stage, children be encouraged to read *silently*. However, very young children who are just beginning to read, should first be allowed to **listen** to a 'model' reading of the text (by the teacher or some other person) and then be asked to read the text aloud in chorus. But as their reading skills develop, they should be helped to move away from 'reading aloud' to 'silent reading'.

It is, however, a good practice to *end* a lesson by asking children to read a story aloud *after* all the other activities have been done. Since they have already read the text silently and understood it, they can now read it aloud more confidently and meaningfully.

Over-all understanding of the text

A good reader tries to understand the meaning of the 'whole' text before focusing on the details of the text. Teachers should, therefore, help children to understand the 'over-all' meaning of the text before they concentrate on the details.

3 After reading

During the '**After-reading Stage**', children are made to perform a number of language activities which focus on Reading Comprehension,

addition to Listening and Speaking.

3(a). Teaching Grammar

Some teachers seem to be under the impression that the new approach to the teaching of English which this textbook represents is opposed to the teaching of grammar. This is not a fact. However, most language experts believe today that during the initial stages of language learning (say, for the first four or five years of learning English), the emphasis should be more on **fluency** than on **accuracy**.

Fluency and Accuracy

Fluency refers to the ability of a child to speak or write with confidence and without hesitation. Accuracy refers to the child's ability to speak or write *correctly*.

Most of the pupils in our primary schools come from homes where there is very limited use of English. When they are asked to speak or write in English, they feel nervous and diffident. Even if they have something to say, they hesitate to say it. The teacher's primary responsibility at this stage is to help children develop the confidence that they *can* speak and write English.

When children attempt to speak or write, they commonly make mistakes. Some teachers seem to believe that when a child makes a mistake, he/she should be corrected at once, or else the mistake will grow into a 'habit', which will be difficult to correct later. However, the child is likely to lose confidence if every mistake is corrected immediately. During the early stages, therefore, the teacher should not focus on the mistakes which children make, but allow them to express themselves freely. Fluency is more important than accuracy for communication.

This does not mean, however, that we should pay no attention to accuracy at all. From the very start, accuracy should be an important

objective. The question is : how can we balance fluency with accuracy ? They seem to be taking us in opposite directions.

Young children learn language mainly by observing, imitating and comparing. If a child observes that most people are saying “I am going”, it will learn to say “I am going”. If, on the other hand, the child hears most people saying “I is going”, it will learn “I is going”. The child will learn the kind of language, to which it is exposed.

But even if the child is exposed only to correct language, it will still make mistakes. Making mistakes is a necessary part of the process of learning language and cannot be avoided. The teacher should remember this whenever he or she deals with the children’s mistakes in English.

Formal and Functional Grammar

Grammar is taught to make children aware of the fact that every language has rules which must be followed. This awareness can be created directly by presenting the rules clearly, or it can be created *indirectly* by presenting plenty of examples and helping children to form their own rules from these examples. The direct teaching of the rules of grammar is called **formal grammar**, while the indirect teaching of rules from examples is called **functional grammar**.

We are of the view that Formal Grammar should not be introduced during the first four to five years of English. However, even at this early stage, children should be made aware of the importance of using language correctly. This can be done by exposing them to Functional Grammar.

Formal Grammar makes use of technical terms, definitions, and explanations of grammar rules, as well as examples and exercises for practice. Functional Grammar tries to create ‘grammatical awareness’ by

drawing the child's attention to the way in which words are used in sentences, without giving rules directly or using technical terms and their explanations.

An example will help to explain this point.

Let us suppose that the teacher wants to introduce children to the grammatical rule of "subject-verb agreement" – in other words, he/she wants them to learn that plural verbs should be used with plural subjects, and singular verbs with singular subjects. If a child does not learn this important rule, he/she will make such mistakes as "My friends is going home" or "My friend are going home."

A teacher using the Formal Grammar approach would first introduce the terms "noun", "pronoun" and "verb", using definitions such as "A verb is a word that refers to an action", and giving examples. The teacher might then introduce the terms "Subject" and "Predicate", again using definitions and examples. Next, he/she might explain that every Predicate contains a verb. Only then could the teacher come to the "agreement" rule, which would also be explained with examples.

If, on the other hand, the teacher relies on the Functional Grammar approach, the children will first be given lots of examples of sentences containing plural as well as singular subjects, used with verbs in their appropriate forms (singular or plural). These sentences would, ideally, form part of an interesting story given to the child to read, so that the "subject-verb agreement" rule is shown in practice, though not explained through the use of technical terms.

The presentation of examples could be followed by exercises which help children to focus on "subject-verb agreement." For example, exercises of the

“Mohan goes to a boys’ school, but his sister Urmila goes to a girls’ school. But all their friends _____ to a co-educational school, which admits boys as well as girls.”

The child should be able to see that the blank space has to be filled in with some form of the verb ‘go’ (either ‘go’ or ‘goes’), although the teacher has not given any rules or explanations. If a child uses the wrong form (‘goes’ instead of ‘go’), he/she will get feedback from the teacher as well as the other children who have made the correct choice. Through several exercises of this kind, the child will be able to form his/her own grammatical rule.

If children are able to understand all the technical terms and explanations, then they might be able to benefit from the teaching of Formal Grammar. But there is reason to believe that very young children are not able to understand such abstract concepts as ‘Subject’ / ‘Predicate’, ‘Present Tense’ / ‘Past Tense’, etc. The teaching of Formal Grammar at the early stages can, therefore, become a mental burden on the child. Therefore, the teaching of Formal Grammar should be postponed until the child has developed enough intellectual maturity to understand abstract ideas clearly.

With these words, we appeal to all our teachers to develop a sense of commitment to teach English effectively. We wish them all success in their effort to help their pupils in learning English.



National Anthem

Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka, jaya he
Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.

Punjab-Sindhu-Gujarat-Maratha

Dravida-Utakala-Banga

Vindhya-Himachala-Yamuna-Ganga

Uchchala-Jaladhi-taranga.

Tava shubha name jage,

Tava shubha asisa mage,

Gahe tava jaya gatha,

Jana-gana-mangala-dayaka jaya he

Bharata-bhagya-vidhata.

Jaya he, jaya he, jaya he,

Jaya, jaya, jaya, jaya he !

