

Teaching Pattern Practice With a Language Game

BY CARLA WEUSTHOFF

In our Hawaii schools we find many children who rarely make use of our basic English sentence patterns and who have extremely meager spoken vocabularies. We need to provide interesting and easy opportunities for repeated oral expression using standard English forms. There are many specific speech concepts and practices we need to teach and then the crystalization and expansion of this knowledge calls for drill.

Is there a flexible oral word game which can be adapted to different levels of learning or skill and which can provide practice in a variety of concepts, or specific aims which the teacher has at the moment?

I have used the simple parlor game "I Spy" (or "I See" - or a variation, "I Am Thinking of Something") as a language arts tool to develop various responses from the children, and have found the youngsters most enthusiastic participants. And because this game seems to fit so well into the principles and methodology we have been studying in TESL, I thought I might suggest it to you and point out some of its advantages.

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Primarily, the game can provide pattern practice in four basic English sentence structures: (1) the three-part sentence, (2) the inverted question, (3) the negative response, (4) the positive response. It allows for repetition, replacement of words and expansion of expressions, and it highly motivates vocabulary growth.

Method of Presenting. The teacher explains to the children the nature of the game (which will follow) and if the children are second graders or above, she will need to tell them that although the game they are going to play will be fun, and may even

become very exciting, it is a learning device and the rules of the game call for their adhering to the proper speech patterns that are being taught. (Otherwise they will wave and point, saying "is it dis?" or "it dat?")

Using the correct stress, rhythm and intonation, the teacher presents the statement and answer forms - perhaps the following:

(Child who is IT, or the Leader)

2 I see something³ green.

(Child volunteering to guess)

2 Is it the green³ chalkboard?

(Leader) No, it is not. Or, No, it isn't. Or, Yes, it is.

Because we usually have several very shy or inarticulate children in a class the teacher might, in accordance with Finocchiaro's method, have the whole class repeat these utterances for sound practice and to gain confidence. When the whole class has imitated the teacher for two or three examples, the teacher may call upon individual children to repeat alone from their seats. Then, she may choose a capable child to be the first "IT", and so on. The teacher needs to stress that turns to guess be widely given so that every child will have a chance to participate.

Once the sentence - question pattern is mastered by most of the children, the objectives of the game can be shifted to a variety of other skills, which will depend upon the nature of the group-age level, English language familiarity, etc.

One can see the possibilities of using this game in extremely simple and controlled form with a group of very young children, or children from non-English speaking families. By utilizing a limited number of objects,

or pictures, a yellow banana, a yellow pencil, a yellow flower; a red apple, a red crayon, a red ball; a green leaf, a green book, a green marble, the names and identification of a few colors and of a few common articles can be taught - along with the important statement and question patterns.

Application

For utilization in the needs of the second to slow-sixth grade Hawaii youngsters, we can find this game helpful in some of the following ways:

(1) To expand upon the vocabulary building aspect, it involves identifying objects by the names by which they are known and making use of these names. This means using many nouns and adjectives, and it works toward overcoming usage of expressions like "da kind", dis dat, da-blah-ovah-dere, etc.

(2) It requires much use of correct possessive forms, i.e. "Is it Mary's dress?" - not "Mary dress?".

(3) It can provide additional sentence usage: "Please give us a hint," (or a clue); and "I suggest that we give up."

(4) It allows for creative expression for the more articulate children who enjoy enlarging questions to fairly elaborate degrees as in "Is it the green leaves in the pattern of Henry's shirt?", or "Is it the blue words on the cover of John's book?", etc. In fact, the child who is "IT" soon develops a tendency to require specific questions - he asks "what pink on the bulletin board?", and the questioning child is faced with the need to use adequate language to point out what he has in mind.

(5) The above paragraph shows that the child learns the need and value of prepositional phrases to indicate just 'where' - to show relationships in regard to location and position.

(6) The game can be geared to a limited vocabulary or concept building area, such as a social studies vocabulary (items of clothing, etc.) or arithmetic concepts - geometric shapes - "I see something round,