

Games, Songs, Finger Plays in TESL

By Janice McArthur

The use of games, songs and finger plays has a very important place in the teaching of English as a Second Language, particularly with young children.

In Head Start, Kindergarten, and first grade there are many reasons for incorporating these into daily lesson plans.

I worked with Head Start children (ages four and five) from an isolated place on the Navajo Reservation who had little or no contact with English.

Most of the children had older brothers and sisters away at a boarding school who spoke English, but, because their parents didn't speak English, Navajo was spoken at home. When the children came to Head Start it was their first experience with school and English.

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I found that one of the best ways to expose children to English was to make it a fun time where they learned without being pressured.

Four and five year old children have a very short attention span, so activities were needed to keep their interest.

Since many of the sounds of Navajo and English are quite different, the first thing was to expose the children to the basic sounds of English.

Navajo is often called a nasal, guttural language because its phonemes include many nasals and

glottal stops.

Since a record player was new to the children, songs were introduced very early in the year. We began by just playing records during their free play and creative periods, then went to a more formal period with the children sitting in a circle singing along with the record. Sometimes pictures were used to illustrate the words of the songs.

A common element that most songs and finger plays have is that of repetition, very necessary in language learning because sounds and words are best learned by hearing and saying them over and over again.

Another element they have is that of exposing the children to the different English vowel and consonant sounds.

An excellent song is "Old Mac Donald Had a Farm". It is full of repetition and also has many of the vowel sounds in it.

Another such song is "Doe, a deer" from the Sound of Music, as it contains many vowel sounds and is easily learned.

Finger plays teach the sounds of English through rhyming words. An example:

Two little birds sitting on a hill
One named Jack; one named Jill
Fly away Jack; Fly away Jill
Come back Jack; come back Jill

The index fingers are used to represent the two birds, and the hands are hidden behind the back when the birds fly away.

An example of a finger play that is a good repetition drill is called Jumping:

Jumping is fun,
Jumping is fun,
Jumping is fun for everyone.
The longer you jump,
The better you jump,
So jump, jump, jump.

In this finger play the hand is moved in a jumping motion. This may also be used as an action exercise with the children performing the acts. Various actions, such as hopping, skipping, etc. might be used.

Finger plays and songs can teach other concepts besides language skills; they can also teach vocabulary.

The following two finger plays can be used to teach the parts of the body:

Eyes: I have two eyes to see with (touch eyes)

Tongue: A tongue to say good-day (stick out tongue)

Hands: I have two hands to wave with (wave hands)

Feet: Two feet to run away (pointing to feet)

Two little eyes that open and close,
Two little ears and one little nose.

Two little cheeks and one little chin
Two little lips with teeth closed in.

This finger play can be sung or spoken:

Head, shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes, knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
Eyes, ears, mouth and nose.

It is a very active song and the children enjoy it because it gets them up and moving as they point to various parts of the body.

Games

Games may also be included in the lesson plan. Some things to keep in mind when choosing games are, that they should help the child understand the new language better, add variety to the lesson, and help the child learn new language skills.

Children have practiced listening during the years before coming to school. These skills can be capitalized on to expose the children to English as well as to develop the skill of listening.

One such game is called You Must:

The children form a circle. The leader stands in the center of the circle to give directions. Whenever he gives a direction and in-

troduces it with "You Must" the children in the circle follow the directions.

Simon Says is a variation of the same game.

I have found that developing listening perception and auditory skill is very important in teaching English as a Second Language.

The children must hear the sounds before they can repeat them. Games provide an enjoyable way of accomplishing this.

Games can be used to teach sentence structure and plural forms, also descriptive phrases and readiness activities for reading.

The use of games, songs, and finger plays takes on a very vital role in teaching young children. They make learning fun, create a pleasant atmosphere, and keep the children interested longer.

During these activities they also hear the correct sounds of English and learn how to pronounce them. All this is done with the pressure off -- in a warm, acceptive environment.

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