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A SKILL OF SKILLS



G.MANJULATHA DEVI

Asst. Prof. English, Jyothishmathi Institute of Technology and Science Karimnagar, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Introduction

Learning is a never-ending activity. It is a committed effort of an individual to absorb knowledge. Hence it is not circumscribed by any academic life. The more an individual is engrossed in this activity, the wider he can stretch the zone of his wisdom. According to Dewey, "Knowledge is a function of association; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned." (Dewey, 1954).

The opportunities to acquire knowledge ought to be provided to students in learning centers, where they feel less apprehensive in the supervision of the teacher, who acts as a facilitator. The teacher needs to realize that his task is not to transmit the knowledge, but to alleviate the intensity of any difficulty which the learner experiences in learning. It is necessary that a student is to be equipped with different skills by developing which s/he is able to comprehend independently. Therefore there should be special emphasis on language skills such as, listening, speaking, reading and writing and students have to be involved in activities which make them efficient users of language.

Learning Intricacies- Learning is a joyful activity when it is not a liability to the learner. Dearth of required skills among learners is the root cause for any failure in their understanding of language or content subject. Hence instruction in affective skills should be an integral part of regular instruction within a specific subject matter. There should be importance for learner's responsibility for learning process.

Terrill (1980) as cited by Ellis (1985) furnishes details to adduce the reason that language can be learnt by imitation. She observes that high school students of Spanish acquired question forms in Spanish, albeit they were not taught by their teacher. They acquired the knowledge through internalizing the syntax of Spanish questions as a result of answering the questions of the teacher of other structures. No doubt the prime intention of introducing language at different levels of education, which encompasses umpteen language exercises to improvise several language skills, is to enable the learners to use the four basic communication skills in spoken or written form, and more importantly, to perceive the necessity of the application of the 'learnt matter' in the actual

situation. Because of the constant exposure to their mother tongue, students need no special training to speak and write in it. But as far as a second language is concerned, it is necessary to learn the rudiments of grammar of that language, the pronunciation rules, etc. So in second language situation teachers should offer training in essential areas of language such as sound, grammar, the lexical and cultural system because the ability to acquire command over the second language requires the longest period of growth. Rutherford says, "A language student can learn the tools of language to engage in grammatical consciousness raising, using them to augment and self-correct her spoken and written expression, and make reflective changes to the linguistic map of how her new language works."

As learners begin to develop proficiency in a new language, they make errors in systematic ways. For example, as they learn in their first language the way of making plurals, they assume that the same method can be adopted to make plurals in the second language. They say mother-in-laws, mans. Hence these errors are based on the assumptions and false rules, they should be made aware of these rules in a second language by the instructor.

Learners who come from different native language backgrounds make similar assumptions, and therefore make similar errors. It is always an effective way of helping the students learn second language by keeping the overall focus on classroom communication, not on error correction. When their errors interfere with their ability to communicate they must be helped to develop strategies for handling the misunderstanding that results. For example, when the student says, 'sir, I am absent yesterday.' The instructor should ask to utter the same sentence again. This will be sufficient

for the student to check himself/herself. S/he realizes that 'yesterday' is past but 'am' is present and therefore corrects himself/herself as, 'I was absent yesterday.'

When the teacher maintains the attitude that mistakes are a natural part of learning, the teacher will create a supportive environment where students are willing to try to use the language even though their mastery of forms is imperfect. John Dewey's inquiry-based philosophy of education conceptualizes the learning process as a "shared activity" in which "the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher."

The most crucial point in facilitating the complexity of learning process is the interaction between a teacher and a student. It is observed that the amount of learning is greater among those students where there are reciprocal interactions in which both teachers and students play active roles than among those where students comprehend everything with the help of teacher. Teachers should share explicit information with students about how experts handle tasks. Ideally they should act as mediators who simulate the development of student understandings through recursive, reciprocal interactions in which both teachers and students play active roles in which curricular understandings are regularly developed over time. Knowles considers the role of a teacher as "a procedural technician, resource person, and co-inquirer; he is more a catalyst than an instructor, more a guide than a wizard" (Knowles, 1970, p. 43)

Reading in Learning—Compared to other basic skills of communication, reading achieves higher degree of significance because of its perpetual existence in learning activity. It is for this reason, implementation of this activity, adopting different methods, techniques,

strategies and plans to develop this skill, has always been a major concern of educators. The importance of reading as stated by Carnegie is:

“Reading is the subject to be learned by children;/ a child will learn little else in today’s world if he does/not first learn to read properly...” (Carnegie,1962:1)

Students who are exposed to reading at different levels do feel at ease to decipher the meaning of the context after they complete academic education and this is what really the pedagogues should aim at. In the real teaching context, which reading strategy can be suggested depends on the type of the text, reader’s background knowledge, their language proficiency and their interest for reading.

The process of reading, according to Ur is defined as, “constructing meaning from a written text” (1996, P.141) To many students and teachers as well, reading is a complicated and scarcely success-giving activity, but nonetheless, it is a hands-on training programme in which the trainees (learners) acquire skills to handle language efficiently. So it is necessary to realize that reading does not mean identifying the word structures and learning pronunciation. It is an interaction between the reader and the writer carried on through text. Carrel and Esday assert “reading is a receptive language process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs “(1998,P.12)

Children under ten years, at the time of reading, mainly scrutinize the spelling of a word. They say, “we cannot pronounce the word because its spelling is somewhat strange.” Nunan suggests “in teaching beginning of reading it would seem reasonable to teach learners the sound symbol correspondence”

(1999, p. 268) and “a phonics (bottom-up) approach in the early stages of reading is the most effective and efficient way”(1999,p.254).

Intricacies in reading according to the opinions of multitude of students originate from word structure. Students begin to show incipient signs of boredom when the frequency of their meetings with words of strange spellings increase. Teaching of word structure and pronunciation will be useful to students when they write because the approach trains students to acquire letter abilities to decode. This includes recognizing the letters and memorizing them. Spelling and pronunciation are important to learn but too much attention on them will damage the very purpose of reading. When the students are constrained to emphasize on the printed text, they begin to work passively to decode the written text in a mechanical way. According to Bloomfield “The person who learns to read acquires the habit of responding to the sight of letters by utterance of phonemes” (Bloomfield,1933: 500-1).

Learners’ cognitive ability and their language proficiency are the significant parameters in teaching a reading skill. Whatever the kind of knowledge the readers acquire, it will enable them to comprehend new information by providing a network within which that new information might fit. (Nunan, 1999,p.257)

“More information is contributed by the readers than by the print on the page. That is, readers understand what they read because they are able to take stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign its membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories..... skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world.”

(Clark and Silberstein 1977:136-7)

Strategies of Successful Reading—

Readers' prior knowledge which is known as schematic knowledge plays a significant role in the reading process. Each reader has unique characters but successful readers share much in common thus derive more or less the same meaning from the same text. Successful readers commonly apply the following reading strategies:

- * -recognizing the words by identifying the spelling and pronunciation.
- * -assessing the meaning.
- * -identifying the grammatical function.
- * -guessing the gist of the text.
- * -understanding the coherence between sentences and paragraphs.
- * -comprehending the ambiguity.
- * -applying personal knowledge to comprehend the implied and unrevealed.
- * -distinguishing main ideas from minor ideas.
- * comprehending the tone of the author, purpose of the writing the text.
- * Understanding the mode of the world in a particular period through the text.

Skills through Reading—The readers while reading undergo multiple experiences. They, at first, experience the familiarity or unfamiliarity of the word and later its pronunciation and later its spelling and finally its literal or implied meaning. Since reading is

experimenting with form and meaning of words, the readers are expected to show adequate seriousness and possess ability to assimilate its outer and inner dynamism.

Learning the spelling and pronunciation matters salient, one cannot deny that, but guessing, inferring paraphrasing, précising, however, are greater skills, which the reader develops through reading. Reading keeps the mind of the readers cautions and endlessly activates their thinking process to alter the information that they take in from the text and produce its changed form in a handy way. At matured level the readers do not read every letter or every word in a sentence. They will guess all the time and as soon as they guess the second word, it will help them the whole part of the sentence.(Paran, 1996,p.27)

Conclusion—It must be believed that the objective of language teaching should be to prepare the students for elevation. Teachers should aim at developing skills among students. They must provide opportunities to students through which they learn how to acquire knowledge by exposing them to different reading materials in the classroom. They can help students become good readers and develop confidence in them that they can read and understand the language themselves.

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