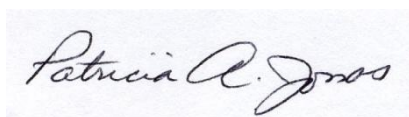


METHODS FOR TEACHING PRIMARY STUDENTS EFL VOCABULARY

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Jones".

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METHODS FOR TEACHING PRIMARY STUDENTS EFL VOCABULARY

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Abstract

The problem presented in this paper is determining how to most effectively teach primary students second language vocabulary. Further, the problem is to determine which teaching methods can be effectively used to enhance vocabulary learning for pupils of different ages. The number of vocabulary words learned determines ultimate language proficiency. The teacher is faced with finding methodologies to minimize impatience and boredom on the part of young learners.

Evidence has already shown that cooperative learning is an effective device allowing students to use each other's potential while engaging in different communicative learning activities. This essay aims at researching various specific teaching approaches, as well as designing some creative games and activities for in-class use in order to put the isolated vocabulary into an integrated linguistic environment and a context meaningful to the students. Hence, students will have greater enthusiasm for the learning process as well as remembering larger numbers of English words to use in a communicative manner. This will prepare and allow the slightly older student who has built a knowledge base to participate more effectively in cooperative learning with its communicative possibilities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How to teach Chinese primary students, ages 6 to 12, effectively is an important topic. They greatly enjoy entertaining games, have short attention spans, and exhibit limited self-control. Reciting new vocabulary words individually and mechanically is not effective as a long-term teaching strategy. So, teachers should try to design a more effective teaching method to attain the very important second-language goal, that is, vocabulary growth. This paper explores studies addressing teaching primary students vocabulary more effectively, based on an analysis of reviewed literature on the topic, and suggested teaching tasks that can be done in class.

1. Direct and Visual Teaching Activities

Based on the psychology of pupils aged six to nine, they should be taught to review vocabulary with different apparatuses, using such abilities as vision, hearing, and imitation. Students gradually remember the vocabulary words after several times of repetition.

2. Interesting Games

Designing some interesting games can enhance pupils' enthusiasm for learning vocabulary words. Pupils can try to master and apply new words effectively in the relaxed atmosphere of "playing games".

3. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative groups encourage pupils aged 10 to 12 to work face-to-face and learn to work as a team, as well as learning to speak communicatively. Early studies of cooperative learning in second language classes suggest the chance for more language practice opportunities and offer a wider range of applied language functions in group activities than the teacher-oriented class does. While cooperative learning

has been documented as having positive influence for acquiring academic language for classroom use, cooperative learning has not reached its full potential for providing these kinds of opportunities. A famous educator named Hu Zhuanglin said that the administrative atmosphere within the school should be supportive of cooperative learning in order to encourage more conscientious pupil participation in such a classroom strategy (Hu Zhuanglin, 2008). The intention is to do research examining effective methods for teaching primary students vocabulary. As teachers apply cooperative learning techniques in classroom practice, they may find various teaching activities such as word puzzles, creation of dialogue, reading activities, paraphrasing and so on can be beneficial for teaching primary students vocabulary. While these activities work for a teacher-centered classroom, many can also be used with groups.

Statement of the Problem

The problem presented in this paper is determining how to most effectively teach primary students second language vocabulary.

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the website of Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over 60 days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through ERIC, “Google”, and “Baidu”. Key search topics include “Cooperative Learning”, “Playing games in the process of study”, and “How to teach primary students second-language vocabulary”.

Method of Approach

A review of the literature discussing how students best learn vocabulary, as well as

some specific teaching techniques using “Teaching Activities” and “Cooperative Learning” to teach primary students vocabulary using word puzzles, dialoguing, reading, paraphrasing, and so on will be examined. Some activities are based on “playing games” during the teaching process in order to raise students’ interest in academic content. Others are based on the communication between teachers and students in the classroom through application of cooperative learning techniques in order to create within students a more vivid experience and memory of new vocabulary to which they are exposed.

Linkage to Theory

Cooperative Learning is based on social interdependence theory.

While vocabulary activities have not been based on or tied to any specific learning theory of language acquisition, Piaget and others propose that cooperative learning is appropriate as a technique to be used with young children. This paper refers to some ideas of Cooperative Learning based on D. H. Hymes’s theories, that is, applying methods of “cooperative language teaching” in order to help our students to be able to use the target language for communicative purpose. To be able to use a language, one needs the knowledge and skills of “language use” and “language usage” (Hymes, 1972).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Vocabulary is the basic factor necessary for mastering a language. While past and current emphasis is often on language structure, vocabulary is equally important, arguably more important, for true second language mastery. Only by accumulating a large number of vocabulary words can we speak fluent English and read quickly. However, remembering vocabulary words is always the biggest obstacle for primary students.

Ronald Carter (1987) observes that "for many years vocabulary has been the poor relation of language teaching" (p. 145). In recent years, however, the teaching of vocabulary has received ever-increasing attention from scholars in second-language teaching,

Some students have a low interest in learning vocabulary words. This makes them have less confidence in learning English well. This will even make them gradually give up studying English. How to make younger students no longer feel it is boring to learn vocabulary words is really worth discussing from the classroom teacher's point of view. Millis (as cited in Jacob, E., Rottenberg L., Patrick S. & Wheeler E., 1996) thinks good communication and cooperation between teachers and students is beneficial for teaching primary students vocabulary words (p. 260).

Theory and Practice in Vocabulary Learning and Instruction

Ryder said (as cited in Blachowicz, C., Fisher, P., Ogle, D., & Watts-Taffe, S., 2006).

There are two things to be examined in the current development of vocabulary education; the first is the amount and depth of research done emphasizing the importance of vocabulary in relationship to school performance; the second issue is the degree to which teachers have been able to interpret and apply the research in their classrooms. [Unfortunately,] examination of vocabulary instruction has revealed little change in classroom practice, nor in the emphasis on vocabulary as to the manner in which it is presented in commercial programs (p. 524).

“Control of the lexicon involves two domains”, according to Nuessell (1994). They include the ability to figure out meanings from context as well as skill in “encoding specific lexical items” in the semantically correct way (p. 118). In this manner, learners are actively involved in applying meaning of the words in context instead of passively acquiring the information (Blachowicz, et al., 2006).

Much vocabulary work consists of isolated drill of words that may or may not be encountered in a related context, i.e., a social one or an academic one.

Strands to Address Recurring Questions from the Classroom

Every day in their classrooms, as experienced teachers are faced with teaching vocabulary in various ways for a variety of purposes, they are always concerned with three of the eight questions listed by Blachowicz, et al. about how to design and implement effective instruction. The questions are, “Which words should be taught?”, “What approaches can bridge the early learning ‘vocabulary gap’?”, and “Can technology be used to enhance vocabulary learning?” (Blachowicz, et al., 2006, p. 525).

1. Which words should be taught?

Beck said (as cited in Blachowicz et al., 2006) that there are several methods that a teacher can apply to choose words that are appropriate for study by his or her class.

Suggested approaches include picking the words that are not well mastered in students' vocabulary and will be encountered frequently in the future "selecting words that are important to what is being read, and choosing words based on the ability to use this word or word parts to learn other words" (p.530).

Nan Jiang (2004) reports on a study she performed to determine what words might be chosen, at least in initial vocabulary lists. While her study was done with adult learners, there seem to be good lessons here that could apply to learners of all ages. She notes that children first learning a language do not learn vocabulary words in isolation, but rather in a context. She also said that they learn the concept the word represents at the same time they learn the word; hence word form and word meaning are inseparable.

Adult learners learn differently. They are often given isolated vocabulary lists. This means that "acquisition is accompanied by little conceptual or semantic development" (p. 417). That means that they most easily learn L2 words closely associated with their L1 semantic structure. While morphology and phonology are learned for the L2, if the concept or lexical meaning does not have a direct parallel in their L1, it takes longer to master the L2 word. Nan Jiang hypothesized a "semantic transfer" process (p. 417) that had to take place before mastery of L2 vocabulary could occur. The generalization that might be made from Nan Jiang's work is that students might be given easier words to start with. This means, give students vocabulary that has the closest word-for-word exchanges between the native language and target language in concepts for beginners.

Most educators would suggest that the words that are mostly frequently used in English are beneficial for learning and that various word lists can help teachers select words appropriate to various grade levels and content areas. Add to this Nan Jiang's belief that using vocabulary words that offer the clearest semantic transfer from one language to the other will assist the early stages of learning an L2.

2. What approaches can bridge the early learning vocabulary gap?

Hart & Risley said (as cited in Jacob, et al., 1996), primary school children have different levels in mastering vocabulary words, this difference is sometimes referred to as the vocabulary gap. Based on this vocabulary gap, Cunningham and Stanovich give a suggestion for solving this situation (as cited in Jacob, et al., 1996),

Reading aloud to pupils, such as telling a story, is an effective way for giving students opportunities to widen their vocabulary. When the children are listening to the stories, they will be given the chance to review their oral vocabularies.

At the same time, some of the new and advanced words can be introduced effectively (p. 532).

Robbins and Ehri (as cited in Jacob, et. al., 1996) also suggest, children who can only master quite limited vocabularies are unlikely to learn new vocabulary incidentally; instead, "a thoughtful, well-designed method of storybook reading will be applied to maximize their learning"(p. 532).

3. Can technology be used to enhance vocabulary learning?

Mckenna (as cited in Herman, P. A. & Dole, J., 1988) noted that the better method to teach primary school student is to make them recognize new vocabulary in the context of the storybook. Pupils listen to these words in the text. For example, many electronic books for school use have a rich context for word learning. Storybooks using the multi-media of computers help students to learn English vocabulary.

As we reflect on the integration of research, theory, and practice that is related to vocabulary development and instruction, we are influenced by what we have learned from research and have been able to apply in practice into the daily classroom. Recently, the most effective ways to teach vocabulary are ones that are connected with the academic courses and include attention to word learning. Vocabulary to be taught should be related to aspects which are relevant and significant for students' motivation.

Importance of Mastering Vocabulary in Second Language Acquisition.

Manzo said (as cited in Herman & Dole,1988), "The traditional way to teach vocabulary words is to require students to learn definitions of words by looking up the words in a glossary or a dictionary. Although this approach is practical for teaching a large number of words, it also has several limitations."(p. 45). Jenkins thought (as cited in Herman, et. al., 1988) vocabulary learning cannot be taught alone. Teachers do not have to spend much time teaching isolated vocabulary (p. 45)

And Davis said (as cited in Herman & Dole, 1988) vocabulary is an important factor for reading comprehension. Most students who are good at vocabulary tests also do well in reading comprehension. In fact, how effective the definition of vocabulary words is always depends on how much knowledge readers already know about a topic.

To acquire vocabulary words has been considered as a means of improving reading and listening comprehension and not as a vocal skill alone (Judd, 1978, p. 71).

We generally judge lexical fluency on people's ability to communicate effectively in the specific social context, which is based on mastering the function of the words rather than what percentage of words is known compared to the total number of words in the language. Stated in another way, a person's vocabulary ability is evaluated in terms of practical communication. (Herman & Dole, 1988, p.71)

Furthermore, Herman & Dole (1988) believe that if vocabulary training is begun early and receives separate attention, students will improve their other skills, especially reading and listening.

Richards said (as cited in Herman & Dole, 1988) “When vocabulary words are being taught to pupils, teachers need to consider how to teach these words to pupils based on the levels of ages, educational background and field of interest. The teacher also ought to recognize such sociolinguistic variables in which the words will be used” (p. 73).

How a teacher might implement a conceptual approach to vocabulary instruction

There are four factors regarding how a teacher might actualize an approach in a conceptual way to teach vocabulary words:

1. Teacher begins with what students already know (earlier referred to as scaffolding):

If students are not familiar with a concept, the teacher can provide direct experience by having students do a relevant activity. If it is vocabulary related to plants, then have students plant seeds or root plants in cups—something they may have done at

home or in a science class. This activity then provides a basis for further learning and other academic vocabulary, such as prepositions and conjunctions in the target language.

2. Teacher connects new information to what students already know:

There used to be a saying that: " Look for the old so as to learn the new." ----and you'll acquire new knowledge that looks like the old."

3. Teacher leads a discussion that centers on how the new concept is like and unlike related, known concepts (as in the examples below):

a. regeneration: If something is cut off a certain part of its body, it regrows a whole new part in that place; the new part looks just like the old one.

b. reproduction: New plants or animals which are propagated by a male and female will look different from either of the parents.

c. grafting: A certain part of a new plant is connected to a host plant, that is to say, a new plant grows on the host plant.

4. Teacher draws together experiences and discussions into a visual display (Herman & Dole, 1988, p. 50).

After reviewing how to better teach vocabulary, based on various studies done, the next part of this paper will address how cooperative learning techniques might be used to implement various insights regarding vocabulary growth. By using cooperative learning methodologies, it is hope that not only will vocabulary necessary for reading be improved, but also the communicative and informal side tied to foreign language usage, specifically English.

Cooperative Learning Used for Acquiring English Vocabulary

The “learning together” forms of cooperative learning influence opportunities for acquiring English vocabulary. The forms of cooperative learning seem especially beneficial for second language learners aged ten to twelve or older, when they have gained enough basic foreign language skill to participate in basic spoken interactions. Johnson, Johnson & Holubec said (as cited in Jacob, et al., 1996) the four basic principles below are necessary for successful cooperative groups: they are, face to face interaction among students, which means that students must work together; positive interdependence, which indicates that students must perceive that their success is linked to the success of the others in their group; individual accountability, which means that each student is held responsible for learning the material; appropriate small-group skills, which indicate that students must learn appropriate skills for being a productive group member and that teams must examine how their group is functioning (p.259-260). These four basic principles of teaching present ways to adapt existing lessons to cooperative learning.

Jacob, et al. (1996) gives the example of Mrs. Parker, who, near the beginning of the 1988-1989 school year said that her goal for using cooperative learning with lively teaching activities was to have her students learn how to work together and help one another by learning English vocabulary words effectively and meaningfully. The student-centered goal for cooperative learning is to have her students ultimately learn more independently. Mrs. Parker designed three kinds of teaching methods for cooperative learning: completely cooperative, which required students to work

together to complete the task, “helping required”, which asked students to help one another to complete the task, and “helping optional”, which encouraged but did not require students to help one another (Jacob, et al., 1996, p. 272). The “helping optional” task might be used when the group task was tied to a review of past material, or when the teacher is actually checking to see to what degree students have learned the communication skills that cooperative learning is supposed to foster between students. In other words, at what point and under what conditions will students willingly help each other without being told to do so.

Just as importantly, Johnson said (as cited in Jacob, et al., 1996): “Cooperative learning influences opportunities for acquiring second language for those aged 10-12” (p. 256). Optional exchanges encourage a more genuine, informal, conversational interplay, one of the goals of encouraging communicative use of a foreign language.

Although cooperative learning has not, according to Jacob, et al. (1996), seem to reach its full potential in education, it offers opportunities for learning vocabulary words. Krashen said (as cited in Jacob, et al., 1996): “Cooperative learning is beneficial for L2 learners because it offers opportunities for working together that focuses on the meaning of the vocabulary words in contexts in a low-anxiety way” (p. 254).

But students sometimes are confused about cooperative learning activities and their purpose. When reviewing students' actions in cooperative learning groups, it was found that they mainly focused on getting the assigned tasks finished within the class period rather than on understanding the material (Jacob, et al., 1996).

Obviously, part of the teaching task of using cooperative learning is to understand the efficiency with which L2 learners can acquire academic English. But how the activities are presented and how the group will be held responsible for individual comprehension of material by the teacher must be carefully monitored. An example of how to encourage meaningful participation, would be in reading activities provided during which one student read aloud while the others followed along silently (Jacob, et al., 1996, p. 271). Then activities the group would have to complete, based on the successful comprehension of the reading done by the group would place more importance on the learning or understanding of content rather than on completion of a task within a time limit.

It is possible, according to Jacob, et al. (1996) to acquire academic English as observed in a social classroom studied, where the Learning Together method of cooperative learning provided L2 learners with a wide range of opportunities to practice (p. 274).

Findings suggest that teachers are required to have a broad understanding of academic language themselves if they want to fully utilize the benefits of cooperative learning, including SLA theory, in their teaching goals. Tasks must be created to support the anticipated needs of L2 learners, with the teacher inspecting what is happening in the groups, and adjusting the their plans if they are not getting the learning they had expected (p. 275).

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the knowledge of some experienced teachers, it has been proven both statistically and anecdotally that lively teaching activities, often tied to previous learning and appropriate learning theory, increase vocabulary learning and retention. With games in the class, along with putting the isolated vocabulary words in a significant linguistic environment, good methods for creating a vivid atmosphere in order to teach primary students vocabulary words are created. Through a review of the literature, the research conducted on teaching primary students vocabulary words effectively offers several perspectives as to how such material can be more effectively introduced to students. Three concepts for teaching vocabulary to different age groups are classified below, particularly with regard to the teaching of pupils of ESL:

First, some concrete (rather than abstract) teaching activities must offered, particularly to younger children, to explain the vocabulary learning expected of them. “Active teaching and learning in class [which can be a strong trait of group-oriented cooperative learning] is beneficial for teaching primary students vocabulary words”, says Nan Jiang (2004, p. 430). Second, some designed games which will be explained below, can also be a method of cooperative learning, and are also beneficial for teaching primary students vocabulary words.

Finally, the method of putting vocabulary words in the appropriate linguistic environment can also an aspect of cooperative learning. These teaching methods, used with primary students, help them remember not only the meaning, but also the usage

of each word. Nan Jiang's work also reminds us of her semantic hypothesis, that at beginning levels we should teach words in the L2 that have very similar semantic connotations with the L1. Examples of some suggested teaching activities for teaching primary students vocabulary words while remembering the three concepts just summarized follow.

Teaching Activities

Students aged six to eight obviously have a shorter attention span. They consider it very boring to remember English vocabulary words if they are presented as lists reinforced by repetitious drill. Activities play an important role in learning the meanings of vocabulary words, and these teaching tasks are important to make connections among words, concepts and learning strategies to make word-learners be more participative in the class (Blachowicz, et al., 2006). Teachers should try to design various teaching activities in class that allow for the use of physical action, phonological interest, and excitement of the imagination. Here are some activities that support all three of the above elements.

A. Children's Poems

Teachers can try to use the vocabulary words they have learned to make up some children's poems that appeal to younger students' level of comprehension.

Such poems mostly have their own rhymes, interests and artistry. Primary students aged six to eight are fond of reading and reciting poems. Children's poems also offer abundant cultural content. It is impossible for primary students to focus all

their attention for the length of a class period. Therefore, the success of such poetry depends on both the content and the method that the teacher uses in the class to convey the poems. Again, this type of material can teach about the target culture as well as teaching vocabulary.

Gestures play an important part in human sensation and constitute a pervasive element of human communication across culture (Roth, 2001, p. 365). And Piaget said (as cited in Roth, 2001) gestures play an important role in learning, development, and communication in teaching kids. So, teaching children's poems with gestures is an effective way to learn vocabulary for children aged six to eight.

Here is an example using some vocabulary related sports to make up a children's song: "Football, football, play football" (asking all the students to do the gestures of playing football while reading the sentence); "Basketball, basketball, play basketball" (asking all the students to do the gestures of playing basketball while reading the sentence); "Floor, floor, sweep the floor" (asking all the students to do the gestures of sweeping the floor while reading the sentence); and so on. This activity is probably best directed by the teacher with this age group. Being asked to mimic the teacher will focus and better control short attention spans.

B. Singing

Singing songs in English is a good activity to use in class. If students sing one or two songs with appropriate gestures, a harmonious class atmosphere is encouraged, and students' attention is easily focused. Singing songs with gestures, using them just as with poetry, increases student involvement in the learning process. Activities that

are gestural, visual and physical can be used in learning new skills which include both learning physical concepts, as well as arriving at the goal of learning and knowing vocabulary words (Roth, 2001).

In the class, teachers can divide the whole class into several groups; each group is required to participate in the chorus so that they can master more and more vocabulary words in this activity of collaborative (not cooperative) learning for very young students. Students can connect certain vocabulary words with the music, hence raising students' interest in reviewing some English words. For example, when the students are reviewing vocabulary words about the different parts of one's body, the teacher can connect these words with the popular song titled "The Song of Health," whose words are as follows: "Please get up early, shaking hands, kicking legs, bending arms, clapping shoulders, so that you will be healthy." The brisk rhythm, melody, and different tones and cadence will attract the attention of primary students. The students can dance together while singing this popular song. This series of activities will make students remember the vocabulary words automatically. Somehow the patterned rhythm and music facilitate memory. If one were to try to adapt this activity to older students, they might be placed in cooperative groups where they are given a melody to which they must attach a list of vocabulary words in a meaningful way. Then they can perform as a group for the class, with the best performance, as determined by the teacher and a pre-established criteria, being awarded points or a humorous prize of some kind.

C. Spelling Competition

A spelling competition in the class is also very important as a way to reinforce reciting vocabulary words aloud so the teacher can check for pronunciation.

Even so, spelling the words mechanically and individually is so dull. Therefore, teachers should think about designing a more scientific method, that is, letting students make full use of their mouths, hands, and brains. Chastain says : (as cited in Judd, E.L., 1978)

Vocabulary knowledge is generally not taught as a skill individually. Instead, most methodologies of teaching vocabulary are considered as part of language learning such as reading or listening comprehension (p. 72).

In order to lessen the criticism Chastain offers about the way vocabulary is usually taught, teachers could divide the class into several groups to have a competition. Or, small groups, if the students are older, could hold their own competition and select the strongest student to then go on and compete with the representatives of other groups. Another way to bring physicality into the learning process could occur when the students are learning some words about fruit, and teachers bring different kinds of fruit to classroom for students to touch and eat. The eyes of all the students in each group could be covered with a blindfold. Students are then asked to taste the fruit in that group. And they will also be asked to spell the names of the fruit that students are tasting.

Also, the teacher or students can ask several groups of students to stick labels of school things onto some practical items such as rulers, pens, pencil cases, and so on. Then students could monitor each other to make certain that everyone uses only the

English word when referring to those items.

And students can also try to play the “guessing game” by writing down a word from a vocabulary list on the back of their hands. The other students then try to guess within limited guesses what word is written on someone’s hand. Another version of this might be having someone place a vocabulary word on someone’s back so s/he cannot see it. The wearer of the word might be able to ask two questions about the word in order to guess what it is. Then s/he must spell the word correctly before it can be removed from his/her back. So above all, the students should feel that they are doing activities instead of reciting some words alone by themselves.

Abundant Designs for Games in the Class

As already stated, “enjoying playing games” is the natural character of children. If students have already mastered the basic meaning of the vocabulary words in the text books, they can try to revise these words through some different kinds of games in order to make a boring revision lesson more exciting. Students may feel it is relaxing to learn English words by taking part in different kinds of games in class. Raising students’ interest can make vocabulary teaching more effective. Games can be designed in accordance with the different ages and aptitudes of pupils. For the pupils aged 10-12, games can more clearly be designed to address cooperative learning methods (Blachowicz, et al., 2006).

A. Guessing Game

Teachers can hold a “guessing game” (e.g., students can put many different kinds

of toys on a desk or table. One of the students is required to come to the blackboard without looking at the vocabulary word representing one of the objects that the teacher writes on the board behind them. All the other students will try to do some pantomiming or gesturing as clues for the student whose back is to the board. The student at the blackboard is trying to guess what the word is. If the word is guessed correctly, all the students in the class are required to spell aloud the word.)

This direct and visual teaching method will create an involved and interested class. A brief quiz conducted by the teacher to check for learning after such an activity would help confirm the value of such activities.

B. Hide Guessing

Recognizing the general curiosity of children, a teacher recognizes that primary students are interested in things that they do not know but have a chance to guess. The teacher can hide something behind his or her back, asking all the students to guess what it is. Pupils can be asked to use all the vocabulary words they have learned to guess what the target of word is. Then the correct spelling would need to be recited by the correct guesser. This activity works well with younger children with whom very concrete vocabulary is generally used. If the word is a verb or a more abstract concept, the teacher might have to do a pantomime for students to guess. This activity could be used with older students in small groups where they would create the gestures or pantomime necessary to offer clues to other class members when it is their turn to perform before the class.

A teacher can give some clues telling the student what the basic category of the

vocabulary word is. Also, a teacher can read some of the words, silently mouthing the vocabulary. Students can then try to guess what the word is, based on the shape of the teacher's mouth. This could also be done to reinforce spelling, by having the students write what they think the word is, and then having the teacher reveal the answers after mouthing several vocabulary words.

C. Word Puzzle

The teacher can also design a "Word Puzzle," which is also called a "Word Cross" (see appendix), asking the students to cooperate in groups to find and circle the words that the puzzle contains. This game is appropriate for pupils aged 10 to 12. This game might work better with pairs than a group so that both students have easy access to the puzzle. The teacher might also place several versions of the word in the puzzle, with only one of them being the correct spelling. The students must circle only the word with the correct spelling. A group of students might cooperatively create their own puzzle, using vocabulary from a story they had read. Each group's puzzle could then be exchanged with another group for that group to solve.

Good problem-solving activities of the puzzle type include some or all of the features for effective second-language learning activities, that is, contextualization (such as using words from a story the class had shared), visualization (such as being able to isolate visually the letters constituting an appropriate vocabulary word), diversification, and personalization (Nuessel, 1994).

D. Lucky Turn Plate for Learning Colors

When we are learning vocabulary words representing colors, we can design a

“lucky turn plate” with different colors on it. Before the teacher spins the turn plate, he or she can begin to ask each team, “What color will it be? Can you guess?” The teams begin to raise their hands. One team guesses “red,” another team guesses “green,” another “blue,” and so on. When the teacher is spinning the “lucky turn plate,” the team which guesses correctly will be given a point. Based on the teaching method of elicitation, children aged 6-8 are always very sensitive to colors, and they are very interested in learning the different words for colors. If they are required to anticipate what the color might be, they will be given the chance to express the vocabulary words of colors as frequently as possible in order to review these words in an active way. Again, this activity is geared toward the very young, beginning learner. To increase the complexity a little and to put the color word in a linguistic environment, the group might be asked to name an object that is the color of the correctly “guessed” word. For example, a group might have to tell the teacher, in English, that “apples are red”, or the “Chinese flag is red, “ or “Lu Wen’s dress is red”.

E. “Relay Race” for the Vocabulary

Many teachers are afraid of teaching contents that are too difficult for primary school students, aged 10-12. However, when the students are interviewed, they often reflect that the work was too easy for them (Gersten, 1996). So teachers must try to adjust and create varied activities in order to make the teaching task be more challenging on a day-to-day basis. In other words, a single game or activity often loses its interest for students after playing it once or twice. It is the teacher who must

continually modify and adjust such games to maintain student interest and involvement.

An example of this might be a teacher's designing a teaching game or "Relay Race" to make pupils cooperate in groups by applying vocabulary words based on the words given to them by the previous group. Students are divided into groups A and group B. Each group is required to write down a word on the blackboard. The next student should write down another word which begins with the last letter of the previous word. And the words in each group should not be repeated. And finally, the group which can write down the most words with the least mistakes in the limited time will be the winner. The word groupings used might relate to certain themes or stories or subject matter in order to make the game even more complex and to give the word groupings more of a linguistic context.

F. Spelling Games with the First Letter Given

Teachers who want to maximize the benefits of cooperative learning must observe what is happening in the group (Jacob, et al., 1996). Children aged 10-12 are old enough to master a certain quantity of vocabulary words. Teachers can apply the teaching technique of "output", trying to make children of this age use as many words as possible during the teaching game.

In the "spelling game", the teacher gives each group one letter, and each group is required to make up at least five words which begin with the given letter. The group which responds very quickly, speaking the words correctly and making up the most words will be the winner.

This is the example:

1: an, and, angle, are, ask.....

2: box, book, bog, black, breakfast.....

The teacher can also divide students into groups, asking each group to write down one category of the vocabulary words as many as possible.

This is the example:

1: fruit: apple, orange, pear, strawberry.....

2: animal: cat, dog, horse, pig, fish, cow.....

This game aims at asking students to remember and classify the vocabulary words they have already learned before.

Words Applied in the Linguistic Environment and Cooperative Learning

Vocabulary words are considered to be the bricks for building a house. But the bricks alone can not build a good house. The basic unit in communication is the sentence instead of the word. The words will not be active until they are put into a sentence. The contextual approach to vocabulary instruction is designed to teach students the meanings of new words (Herman & Dole, 1988, p. 46). Based on the research with kids of different ages, when the vocabulary words are put in various contexts, pupils will be encouraged to have consciousness and mind of participation in learning vocabulary words (Blachowicz, et al., 2006). Language is considered the tool in communication. Therefore, a teacher should teach students vocabulary words on the basis of a linguistic environment. The primary students aged 10-12 are better in comprehending some complicated knowledge and activities. It often is better to teach them vocabulary words in cooperative learning groups and apply the words they have learned in a linguistic environment.

A. Role Playing

Cooperative learning provides second language learners with contexts (Jacob, et al., 1996, p. 267). In order to create contexts, some teachers design backgrounds for a story using beautiful pictures presented on a Powerpoint for each group. The teacher asks each group to play different roles to make up a dialogue using the vocabulary words they have already learned and based on the content of the picture.

Teaching primary students vocabulary words can also be based on dialogues. Teachers can introduce some of the words which provide both definitional and contextual information about the words to be learned by making up a dialogue for students so that students can understand a further meaning and usage of the words (Blachowicz, et al., 2006. For example, in a class, the teacher could ask a group to design how to begin the new lesson with an interesting dialogue between teacher and students: T=teacher S=student

T: Hello, boys and girls. Let's play a game, OK?

S: OK!

T: Now, please guess. What's in my hand?

S: Is it an apple?

T: No, it isn't.

S: Is this a ball?

T: No, it isn't.

S: Is this a toy car?

T: No, guess again.

S: I think it's an eraser.

T: Now, let's have a look. Oh, it's an eraser. You are very clever.

Based on the dialogue above, we can see that the method to introduce the new

lesson with a dialogue not only helps the students to revisit some learned vocabulary words, but also to act as a guiding role for the new topic in the class. Students can remember words listed in a dialogue more firmly.

B. “-ed Verbs” Learning

Cooperative learning groups provide second language learners with a context in which they can talk aloud in class, that is, produce a "speech" as a way of helping them to solve problems. (Jacob, et al., 1996, p. 267).

The teacher can ask several groups to make up a story using verbs in their past forms. Each student in the group is required to say a sentence, one by one, using the past tense of each verb. Anyone who makes mistakes in transforming the verb in the correct form will lose. The final student in the group will be the winner. This same approach could be used to practice other verb tenses, such as a description of what a group thinks the future world in 100 years will be like. This could reinforce the use of the auxiliary “will” as well as certain other modals, such as “could” and “might.”

After reviewing various means, other than looking up word definitions in a dictionary or drilling alone with vocabulary lists, it is hoped that the games offered as examples above demonstrate ways that researchers maintain students better learn and retain vocabulary. Some of the games offer cooperative, group involvement, some offer a context, others offer physical involvement—all ways the experts maintain students better learn the essential tool for ESL growth. Teachers must continue to search for good ways for teaching primary students vocabulary words. Documenting through the use of various pre- and post tests which processes work best, as well as offering theories as to why such methods work is research very much needed in future language study.

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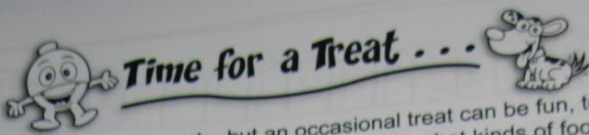
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Appendix

Example of Word Cross activity:



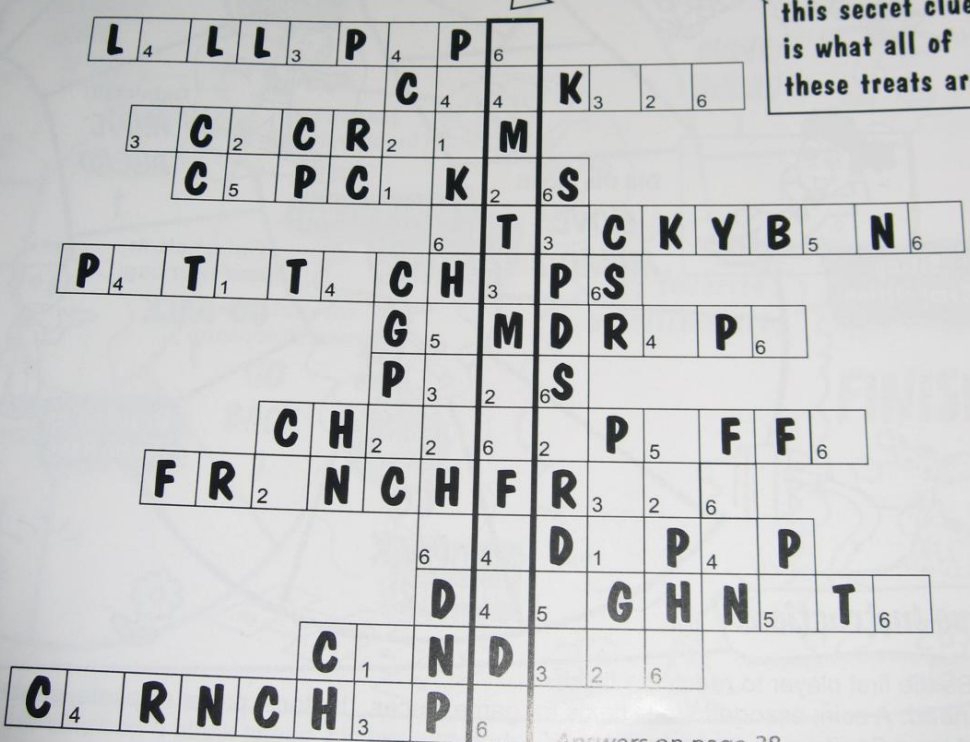
Time for a Treat . . .

Eating healthy is great – but an occasional treat can be fun, too!
 Fill in the letters to find the treats . . . and to discover what kinds of foods they are.

Fill in:

- every **1** with the letter **A**
- every **2** with the letter **E**
- every **3** with the letter **I**
- every **4** with the letter **O**
- every **5** with the letter **U**
- every **6** with the letter **S**

Remember —
 this secret clue
 is what all of
 these treats are!



Answers on page 28

Parent Tip

According to the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines, these occasional foods should not play a large role in your child's healthy diet.