

TEACHING ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL IN INDIA- A PEDAGOGIC ANALYSIS

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If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart. Nelson Mandela

Objective: To suggest appropriate pedagogical practices for learning English in a Multilingual class.

Introduction:

Multilingualism and multiculturalism is in the gene of indigenous Indians as they are acquiescent to an assortment of cultures and languages by birth. The multilingual character of India can be long-established with its beginning in Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asian and Tibeto-Burman language families as well as its history of being ruled by the plethora of diverse invaders. Therefore, education in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual pluralistic realm needs to evolve in such a way that all the segments that constitute that nation develop a sense of involvement in the evolution of governance and nation-building. In addition, the specific aspirations of the individual segments of the nation need to be met to the gratification of the various ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities.

“India has the second largest child population in the world. Hence India is very rich in terms of human resources if properly utilized.” (Children in Agony: A Source Book:259). Consequently, the future of our country largely relies upon the kind of educational prospects we generate and deliver to our children and language, the medium of instruction in the early years has a very important role to play in this context. Although, there are millions of young children in India who are multilingual, our education system is unable to tap their unique ability; rather, they are often initiated into literacy learning in an unfamiliar language. Consequently, education is viewed by children as an activity that has little meaning. This paper will deal with the prominence of the medium of instruction in a multilingual classroom.

A multilingual classroom is a social environment in which children come as pupils with a potpourri of mother tongues. A mother tongue apart from being a means of communication is also a cultural organization which is an essential part of the social, emotional and intellectual life of its speakers. Applied linguists all over the world have emphasized the significance of the motherland as well as the mother tongue in teaching English as a L1 or foreign language context. Most people identify themselves emotionally with the motherland and so is the case with the mother tongue. Mother tongue is the language with which a child recognizes and organizes his experience and environment around him. It is the language used to express one's essentials, notions, views,

joys, griefs and other outlooks. Precisely we can say that Mother tongue allows one to have the cognizance of the world.

What the student brings to the classroom in terms of prior knowledge, culture, experience, and language greatly influences the end result. Here the role of an English teacher is very important and challenging as well. This has to be understood both at the economic level as well as social level (caste, creed etc.). English being the second language or even for many disadvantaged group a foreign language, is seldom used for communication. Commencing school obviously seems to these children a bizarrely traumatic experience in which apparently benevolent teachers neither understand what they say nor speak comprehensibly to them.

Rationale:

While defining language as a means of communication we seem to overlook its wider practicality as a means to think, feel and respond to things. This broader usage of language is particularly significant for people who have to work with children for in childhood, language acts a decisive role in the growth of a child's disposition and capabilities. It acts as an elusive, yet resilient force influencing the child's discernment of the world competencies, curiosities and even ethics and attitudes. Entering a new, classroom environment can cause anxiety for children

However, an English teacher entering a multilingual class think 'English' as a school subject, so they would expect teaching to be done in one specific language only. The teacher lays emphasis upon isolated structures with no real-life reference. Instead the teacher should accentuate teaching of English language based on communicative proficiency rather than mastery of structures.

In Bihar, local dialects- Bhojpuri, Maithili, Maghi, Vajika, Angika, function as home language. The state language is Hindi and the teacher has to teach English. As Mary J Willes in his book "Children into Pupils" quoting Kochman(1972) refers to the Amerindian pupils as source of frustration and disappointment. Similar is the situation in India, like in Bihar children coming to English medium schools are often a cause of distress and dissatisfaction to their educators. All these problems must be present in a severe form for children compelled to begin education in a language that is not their mother tongue, and in the case of a teacher to whom that mother tongue is unfamiliar. This exactly is the situation of some children in other states of India as well. The teacher simply puts aside the pupil's language and start by describing the rules that govern English language, its common structures, its vocabularies etc. This is the scenario everywhere be it the state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. The teacher simply forgets or to be more specific neglects the multilingual character of the classroom, and just focus upon completing the task.

Here the teacher has to understand the mechanism of multilingualism and multiculturalism of the pupils. Every pupil has to be understood as a specific learning unit. The teacher can perhaps understand the pupils position in the classroom only if he puts himself in its place. Young children who come to school away from their loved ones don't know that the parting is impermanent and often have very resilient emotions, or "adieu apprehension." Imagine the handicap he would have if everyone around him is a stranger with a different code of behavior, different system of values and the worst everyone spoke a language different from his. Therefore, the teacher in a multilingual primary classroom has to interpret the pupil's point of view and understand the cultural as well

as the social background of the pupil. It's imperative to concede these feelings candidly and benevolently. The teacher needs to have an insight into the pupils' home language, state language and English as well. The most important the teacher needs to act like a mother in whose cozy cuddle the pupils would feel warm welcome. Just like a mother and a good psychologist the teacher needs to recognize the signals implicit in the movements of child's hands, eyes and facial expressions, for a child's looks and behaviors convey meaning. The environment too largely affects these collaborations as it can increase or reduce responsiveness of the pupils. If a multilingual class is motivated and given full cooperation of an English teacher, they would gradually become good listeners and talkers too.

Pedagogical Practices for dealing pupils in a Multilingual Class

Teachers of primary classes might require constant readjustment of methods and activities since every teaching episode would be a new and valuable experience for the pupils. They in fact need to integrate theories and practices to make teaching a pleasurable experience for both the teachers and students alike. The challenge to produce child friendly environment require a new mindset. The language teacher is usually the most meaningful and direct link in a multilingual and multicultural classroom. Through the teacher the linguistically diverse children may develop the understanding of English language without distorting or underestimating the knowledge of their Mother tongue. The language teacher can make the children understand the benefits of English language and provide activities that could help them receive the language automatically. In this role the teacher functions as a guide to conduct a linguistically diverse class into learning a common English language.

The English teacher can use various effective methods for handling effectively a multilingual class. First of all, the teacher if possible **has to be multilingual** too. She needs to understand as NCF 2005 says, "Multilingualism, which is constitutive of the identity of a child and a typical feature of the Indian linguistic landscape, must be used as a resource, classroom strategy and a goal by a creative language teacher. This is not only the best use of a resource readily available, but also a way of ensuring that every child feels secure and accepted, and that no one is left behind on account of his/her linguistic background."

Therefore, the teacher should have the knowledge of local dialects, local culture and local festivals. Be able to elucidate and translate where the students don't understand with a few humble words. Moreover, the teacher should understand that children are very well capable of understanding and sharing joint enterprises. Therefore, the teacher should try her best to include essential and everyday usage of common English words like egg, meat, chicken, TV, mobile, film, pant shirt cost, tie, bus, car, truck, train, plane, station, hospital, police, doctor, coat, jail, school, classroom, teacher, chalk, duster, pencil, pen lesson test mark sheet headmaster etc. thus building their confidence that they know English. This could be one of the strategies of instruction at the child's level, as we all know motivating pupils is a crucial factor in providing quality learning. Teachers must convince these pupils that learning is important and constantly reward them to encourage their participation. They must be led to believe that a better life is attainable through English language.

Second strategy could be trying to develop trilingual dictionary, like in the context of Bihar:

Local	Hindi	English
जलखाई	नाश्ता	Breakfast
बुतरू	बच्चा	child
ऐगो	एक	one
हम्मर	मेरा	mine
तोहरा	तुम्हारा	yours
भोरे	सुबह	morning
तातर	गर्म	hot
गोड	पैर	leg
उज्जर	उजला	white
करिया	काला	black
भात/चाऊर	चावल	rice
अंगा	कमीज़	shirt
मौगी	औरत	woman
बेंग	मेंढक	frog
टुकुर- टुकुर	एकटक	stare
टुह- टुह	गहरा	deep

As we know that mind works on repetitions, an important strategy of repeating these day to day words, phrases songs, rhymes and associating these with storytelling and play-way method- create a milieu of warmth and comfort.

One of the most important aspects of teaching language is that teachers must have a clear difference between *learning* and *acquiring*. They should see acquisition as the basic process involved in developing language adeptness and discriminate this process from learning. Acquisition is an unconscious procedure that comprises the realistic development of language dexterity while learning is the conscious internalization of the guidelines of language. It leads to overt familiarity about the procedures of language and the skill to articulate this knowledge. Learning actually cannot lead to acquisition.

Story-telling could be one of the most effective methods of acquiring language in a multilingual classroom, as this could bring all the pupils on the same mental platform of exchanging feelings and emotions. Story-telling method is a substantial contribution to language development and a criterion of successful acquisition as children may learn or is capable of remembering only those things to which they pay attention. As John Brierly referring to Jerome Bruner says, “perhaps the most basic thing can be said about human memory after a century of intensive research is that unless detail is placed into a structured pattern, it is rapidly forgotten”. (Children’s Well-Being:105)For example if the material to be recalled is unrelated as a list of random vocabulary, a child

will remember much less than if the words are connected as in a story. Children are easily able to connect themselves through uncomplicated and attractive narratives. Teachers here needs to be proficient at narration, exhibiting the illustrations without missing the impetus of the tale, distinguishing, by proper gesture, intonation and stress, at times inviting the listeners participation, might be in chorus so that they get enthralled.

Storytelling can help children to increase their ability of memorization. Children will recall the name of characters and sequence of events happening in story. To endorse their memory capability, teacher should ask students to repeat the story that they have already listened. This will enhance their vocabulary and in turn make them believe English language an interesting language.

Drama and dialogue could also be an effective method of making children learn language conveniently. For drama, the teacher will make use of people, events, and location—the character, action, and setting of fiction. Dialogues will be part of drama, where characters speak and communicate with one another and the plot moves on. Here the teacher is actually making use of activities that involve real communication where language is being used to carry out meaningful tasks supporting language acquisition. These types of activities are meaningful and entertaining to the learners which boost learning. Like,

Train का timing क्या है?

Express train late है।

First period को bell लग गया है।

हम late हो गए।

कल Doremon time-machine से future में गया था।

Here we see more number of English words being used. So unknowingly they are acquiring the English words. This idea needs to be deployed by providing plenty of opportunities for exploratory and imaginative play like; taking permission for leave, permission for going to washroom, inviting for a party, going to a zoo etc.

Another strategy could be **giving voice to children's thinking**. Teachers must encourage children to narrate stories, express their thoughts, opinions, and doubts after storytelling events in whichever language they choose to, home or school language. The teacher can take ahead pupils' contemplations by probing questions like 'how', 'why' and 'what'. If stimulated to speak in their own mother tongue, children will feel sheltered and poised to share and reflect and this would support them cultivate their language knacks better. The children could be asked to narrate their own story i.e. from getting up in the morning till coming to school.

Children could even be supplied with talks associated with supervised play as play provides children with opportunities for exercise of concentrated attention, which in turn helps them to explore their environment. Drama with dialogues allow talk among pupils, and between pupils and teachers. Such activities even allow intermingling children of similar and different language backgrounds thus fostering learning and sharing of

language experience. It is indeed vital to permit pupils to converse in a language they are comfortable with, for annex of their creativity, progress of thoughts and language.

In this kind of play and conversation games even children with hesitant dispositions naturally take initiatives asserting their claims and defending their views. This would boost confidence, motivation level would increase, and thus good transfer of linguistic habits and structure take place. Learning is maximized when students are engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment instead of traditional teacher-centred classes.

Conclusion

The methodologies suggested in this paper would surely help the primary school teachers. In a classroom pupils are largely dependent upon their teachers. Therefore the teacher needs to provide motivating and appropriate environment for learners to interact and exchange information giving them full autonomy and independence while learning. Apart from the teachers it would also help the pupils in learning English as it would not only give them new words in English phrases, syntax, intonation and what is vital a semantic insight into English. Not only their linguistic insight will increase but these methods would also give them self-confidence and English will be surely considered to be within easy reach of the pupils. These strategies would make them both linguistically as well as socio-linguistically competent. My suggestions that government schools in Bihar should be trained in this method and as far as possible the primary school teachers must belong to the local cultural area where they teach English.

References:

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