

THE SPRINGBOARD EFFECT OF USING RHYMES IN AN EFL CLASS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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In this article we argue that in teacher education much of what you do with the would-be teachers to help them learn English has a springboard effect, in the sense that it is replicated by the pre-service teachers in their practice, in much the same way as they experienced it in the teaching- training course. We illustrate this idea with the use of nursery rhymes in an Integrated English Practice first-year class.

We accidentally became skillful with the use of nursery rhymes in trying to teach English to our toddlers by talking to them in English, an experience that is close to immersion programs or bilingual education.

We were looking for ways to motivate our children to speak and to enlarge their vocabulary, and in our search, some of our colleagues, who had studied before the boom of pop music invaded our country, suggested singing nursery rhymes to them; so they began providing us with all those beautiful rhymes they had learned such as: "Row your boat", "Jack and Jill", "Rock a bye baby", and so on. In time we felt very proud because our children learnt the rhymes very fast, and they improved their English.

To our surprise, we found that nursery rhymes also work with young adults in teacher- education, even more so because they are transferred readily into the middle school class by the pre-service teachers in their practicum period. It all began when one of us told a first year class in the English teacher-training course about our experience with teaching English to our own, and the class asked us to teach them the nursery rhymes too, and so we did.

We selected those rhymes that could be both meaningful and amusing for them, and designed varied activities to encourage group work and to arise curiosity about the target culture. The rhymes were used as warm up for other activities, for

presenting grammar and vocabulary items, for pronunciation practice and for developing oral and writing skills as well.

The students were so motivated that they prepared their own activities for their junior high school students during their practice teaching. The following are some of the reflections given by students when they evaluated their results:

- “I loved to see how the students learned and began to enjoy the English classes when I started teaching them rhymes”.
- “I had a good experience in high school because there I saw they learned better through rhymes. They are easy to remember”.
- “The adolescents liked the rhymes and they also liked to sing them to other teachers”.
- “Adolescents need affection, and by teaching them rhymes we could get closer to them, and sometimes we could help them more”.

The following is an example of how we worked in class.

Aim: To present the past tense.

Materials: A board and some chalk.

Level: Beginners.

Procedure:

1. Motivate the activity by asking about the skills the students have (sing, draw, etc.)
2. A skillful student at drawing will represent on the board what the rhyme suggests, while the teacher or a skillful student at singing will sing it aloud.
3. The teacher will ask the students about the characters and in pairs they will think of different questions to be answered by the rest of the students (analyzing the past tense inductively).
4. Individually the students will copy the rhyme on their notebooks and will mark tone groups, sentence stress and the sounds that are reduced.
5. As an independent work, the students will prepare a class for their junior high school students based on the rhyme to be discussed in teams in the following

class and also will reflect upon this question ¿Is this a good way to develop creativity in my students?

In sum, we may say that in rhymes we can find an endless source of opportunities to increase our students' interest and improve their language skills while enlarging their professional skills and cultural background by putting them in contact with the culture of the English-speaking world. And, as important as that, because what you do with rhymes have the potential of adding to the professional skills and interests of pre-service teachers.

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