

PLAYING AND TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS

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This project tried to answer the query: *Can adult students (who have not studied English before) speak English if they are given the opportunities to do it? The high school subjects in question belong to Instituto San Fernando Ferrini. Subjects study at night and they have not studied English before so they were afraid. Results suggested that changing parameters such as speaking in English most of the time and including dynamic activities such as games could help adult students feel better about speaking. Further research is needed to describe how to improve pronunciation and writing in adult students. The project was based on the legal framework of MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional: Decreto 3011, 1997) that establishes parameters to teach adult students because they have particular characteristics such as families, children, marriages, responsibilities, etc.*

Introduction

Importance of this research. Speaking English is very important and necessary nowadays because it is spoken and used in all fields of work. Hence, this project intended to improve this skill in adult students. We took into account what kinds of activities they asked for in an interview (games and songs).

Subjects. The five subjects attend San

Fernando Ferrini Institute which is located in downtown Bogotá. This Institute has a formal non-intensive high school program divided into cycles open to both young and adult people. This cycle division was established by MEN in the Decreto 3011/97 and has four cycles: cycle 3 which includes students from 6th and 7th grades, cycle 4 which has students from 8th and 9th grades, cycle 5 which has students from 10th grade and cycle 6 which has students from 11th grade in regular high schools. The minimum age to start this kind of program is 15 and there is no upper limit. The group belonged to third cycle, i.e. 6th and 7th grade together. They had two English hours weekly. All of the students had full-time jobs, their ages ranged from 17 to 40, one of the students was married and had children and they had different perceptions about English language as: "I do not like gringos", "I have never spoken a word of English and I won't do it", "An old dog does not learn new tricks", "I like English but it is difficult to speak", etc. It was necessary to break the ice at the beginning with them!

Aim. The aim of this research was to improve speaking in adult students giving them the opportunity to listen to and practice English from the beginning.

Procedure

Action research was carried out, the procedure of planning was drawn up during four months' survey construction, then lesson plans were made, taking into account what type of activities the students asked for (games, and songs), searching for references and material to include in the report and in the classes. Teachers worked in a group. Then the lesson plans were applied which included activities without much use of English (mime and intonation) suggested by Wingate (1993), group work suggested by Golebioswska (1990) and different activities taken from Harmer (1984). The teacher used games, realia, songs and different activities to explain and practice in class. Data was collected and analysed to write the final report, draw the conclusions, and answer the hypothesis to apply this knowledge to further experiences as teachers.

Data collection

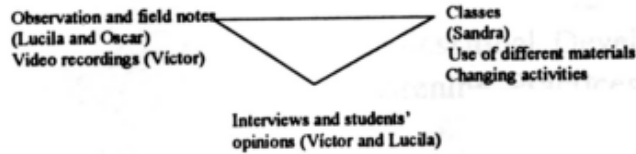
Data collection was obtained from students' surveys. This information was then tabulated and the results showed that speaking was the most important skill for the students as we guessed at the beginning; games and songs were therefore chosen to use for speaking in classes. After this process, the lesson plans were designed and applied by one of the teachers while at the same time two teachers observed the classes, making field notes based on the teacher's

and students' activities. In addition, at the end of these classes, one of the teachers interviewed the students to get their opinions about the material used, the teacher's performance, the kinds of activities and suggestions. Another teacher video-recorded almost all the classes. The field notes and interviews were done in 10 sessions. After each class, the group of four teachers communicated what could be improved, changed and used and there were discussions about the students' opinions.

Results

Students learned and used English more easily and effectively than with other methods like books, self-learning, etc. Through different activities, students achieved a good proficiency in speaking according to the beginners level. They were satisfied with teacher's performance and activities. The teacher had fun while teaching and found that choice of didactic material is extremely important for motivating students. The students spoke in English; not all the time but without pressure.

Shyer students were afraid of talking or participating in classes. Thanks to the activities and teacher's motivation, they fought against shyness and finally they spoke a lot. The students' perceptions changed during the process and they preferred English to their other subjects.



Field notes showed that students were very satisfied learning English through games, songs, realia and speaking interaction among themselves and with the teacher. Their opinions about classes were interesting: in spite of the fact that they had low proficiency in English, they said that all the classes were different and they learned a lot of new concepts and ideas. They thought that group work was a great strategy to learn because they could help each other, speak English and they were very happy. Our research showed that adult students needed great motivation to learn English. Teachers who work with this kind of student have to be professional and very humane.

Conclusions

- * Adult students are concerned about their learning process because they are motivated and they really want to learn.
- * They learn a lot when the teacher uses different and new methodologies and fun activities that involve movement and reflection.

- * When they use spoken language in songs, for example, they practice real English.
- * Group work is an excellent strategy to learn English for adult students: they are generally very shy and this activity gives them opportunities to practice speaking.
- * By the use of games they internalised numbers and they repeated them in context, not mechanically.
- * As long as the students had opportunities to use English they used and understood it as a communication instrument in real situations.
- * It is very important for further research to develop listening, reading and writing in this kind of student.

References

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