

Providing Opportunities for Young Learners to Speak in English

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Abstract

“English learners are getting younger. Across the world, English is being introduced in primary schools, with greater compulsion, and at a steadily lowering age.” Graddol (2006: 88)

“Educationalists all over the world have recognized the need for English language learning at primary level and are doing whatever they can to promote it....” Brewster, et. al (2003: 1)

Two quotations above show the emerging trend in the world of English language learning and teaching, that is teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). The skill of communicating in English in the global world today is considered as one of the must- required life skills. This growing need might be the cause for parents to send their young children to schools which provide English program. However, children in our Indonesian classes have very little opportunities in using English in communication. Therefore with this limitation each of them should have the opportunities to speak during our lesson.

To support the needs mentioned above, this workshop aims at showing some ideas on how we can provide our young learners with greater opportunities to communicate in English, discussing how we can make use of some readily-available sources – like songs, and discussing how we can manage a speaking activity in our EYL class. The participants in the workshop are engaged in activities that are applicable in an EYL classroom. Games like *Bandit and Sheriff*, *Whisper Race*, *Surveying game*, the *Telephone Games* as well as songs like *The Finger Song* and *What Time Is It?* are some learning resources involved in the workshop.

Introduction

Most of the time teachers focus on the development of reading and writing skills rather than listening and speaking. Some teachers claim that these young learners in their school will not face any English listening and speaking tests eventually, rather they will have to deal with tests mainly in the form of reading and writing. Some other teachers

avoid noise in the classroom. A speaking class may go out of control and students may get too excited and noisy. Complaints from other classes is then the most fearsome in conducting a speaking activity. While some other teachers feel like they do not have the courage and the confidence to try to have a speaking activity with their young learners. Here are some songs and games that can be used to situate children to use English orally.

A. Songs

1. THE FINGER SONG

Tommy Thumb, Tommy Thumb

(children hold up both thumbs)

Where are you?

Here I am, here I am

(children bend thumbs up and down)

How do you do?

Peter Pointer, Peter Pointer

(children hold up both index fingers)

Where are you?

Here I am, here I am,

(children bend index fingers up and down)

How do you do?

Middle Man, Middle Man

(children hold up both middle fingers)

Where are you?

Here I am, here I am

(children bend middle fingers up and down)

How do you do?

Ruby Ring, Ruby Ring

(children hold up both third fingers)

Where are you?

Here I am, here I am

(children bend third fingers up and down)

How do you do?

Baby Small, Baby Small

(children hold up both little fingers)

Where are you?

Here I am, here I am,
(children bend little fingers up and down)
How do you do?

Fingers all, Fingers all
(children hold up both all fingers)
Where are you?

Here we are, here we are
(children open and close all fingers)
How do you do?

(Adapted from Fun Songs for the early years)

Variation:

1. After several times this song can be performed by grouping children based on the names of the fingers. When singing the song, children will have to sing the parts that suited to their group's name.
2. The names of the fingers can be replaced by mentioning the names of the students. That way, teachers can check their attendance without having to read from the attendance list. It would be a more meaningful and fun activity for children.

2. What Time is it?

What time is it? It's five o'clock.

Five five five five five o'clock

What time is it? It's nine o'clock.

Nine nine nine nine nine o'clock

Procedure:

During the song the teacher holds a toy clock that shows the time. At the next stages, the children can take turn to lead singing the song with a different time reference either in groups, pairs, or individually.

Variation:

This song is wonderful and quite effective to use when teaching about time. The time mentioned in the song can always change depending on the times that are being learnt.

B. Games

1. Bandit and Sheriff

Game type	: movement game
Language focus	: <i>I've got..., I've caught..., I get..., I catch..., I have..., I don't have...</i>
Age	: 6+
Group size	: 8 – 12 or more
Time	: 15-20minutes or more
Materials	: classroom objects (books, coloring pencils, erasers, rulers, etc), animal toys or pictures of other objects
Description	: The object of the game is for the bandits to 'steal' as many objects as possible, before getting caught by the sheriffs.
Procedure	: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Split the children into two teams. One team are bandits, the other sheriffs. They sit on chairs on opposite sides of the room. You are the 'Marshall' and stand at the end of the room, next to some empty chairs which are the 'prison'.2. Give each bandit and each sheriff a number.3. Place the classroom objects in the middle, but slightly nearer to the bandits. Call out an object and say a number, for example, <i>ruler, four</i>. Bandit number four now runs to get the ruler. At the same time, sheriff number four chases the bandit.4. If the bandit manages to pick up the ruler and run back to his or her chair without being 'caught' (touched) by the sheriff, he or she shouts out <i>I've got the ruler!</i> The bandits' team keeps the ruler. If a bandit is 'caught', the sheriff shouts <i>I've caught bandit number four!</i> Then the sheriff confiscates the ruler and the bandit goes to prison.5. The game continues until all the objects have been stolen or confiscated, or all the bandits are in prison. The team with the most objects wins. The teams swap roles and play a second round.

Variation : Instead of using classroom objects, use cuddly animal toys. The bandits are then the ‘hunters’, and the sheriffs are ‘animal lovers’.

(Adapted from Games for Children)

2. Whisper Race

Game type : Team game

Language Focus : Vocabularies, short phrases, and short sentences that need practice.

Age : 6+

Group size : 10-20

Time : 15 minutes

Materials : Three identical sets of 6-10 cards

Procedure :

1. Split the class into two teams. Put one set of cards beside the wall at one end of the room. The teams sit/stand in two lines. The lines should be about the same distance from the cards.
2. Put one set of cards in front of each line of players. The cards must be in the same order.
3. Call *Go!* And the race begins. The first child from each team turns over the top card, for example a pizza. He or she gets up, runs to the next child in the team, crouches down (when the teams are sitting down) and whisper *Pizza*. The first child the takes the place of the second child, who (gets up then) runs to the next child.
4. This continues until the last child in the line has heard the word. That child runs to the front and tries to take the pizza card from the set of cards by the wall, before the other team reaches it. Whoever takes the correct card can keep it.
5. the game continues until all the cards have been used. The team with the most cards wins. Referee the game strictly, making sure the children whisper.

Variation : Change the theme to any which needs revision.

Tips : If space is tight, have the children crawl instead of running and reduce the distance to the cards.

(Adapted from Games for Children)

3. The Survey Game

Game type	: Whole class activity
Language Focus	: short expressions to question and answer: <i>Do you like...? Do you have...? Yes, I do/No, I don't. Can you....? Yes, I can/No, I can't.</i>
Age	: 8+
Group size	: 10-20 or more
Time	: 15-25 minutes
Materials	: A blank sheet of paper, pencils/pens
Procedure	:

1. Ask children to have a blank sheet of paper or teachers can provide the paper (better to use the clean side of used paper).
2. Ask children to draw four columns in their paper. On top of the first column students will write their friend's names, at the second to fourth column they have to write one word (related to the discussed topic), for example they write *sheep* at column 2, *chicken* at column 3, and *cat* at column 4. Students will have to ask questions to survey the class of who has the three animals.
3. When student asks one classmate, he/she writes her/his friend's name at column 1, then ask questions to the friend. When a *Yes, I do* occurs, a tick (✓) should be placed in the column. On the contrary, when a *No, I don't* occurs as the answer to the question, the student will have to put a X at the column.
4. The game continues for several minutes. Teacher has to encourage students to use the target language. Short answer yes/no is tolerable.

Variation : Instead of putting a ✓ and a X at the column, students can write their friends' name in the column. In so doing, there will be only three columns rather than four. The expressions to use in the game are suited to the topics of the discussion.

4. The Telephone Game

Game type	: Role-play game
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Language Focus : sequences of numbers, telephoning skills
Age : 6+
Group size : 8-20 or more
Time : 15-20 minutes
Materials : two identical series of cards with telephone numbers written on (one card per child); little cardboard telephones for each child or toy telephones
Description : The children telephone each other and learn simple telephone language.
Preparation :

1. Prepare the telephone numbers cards. Write two numbers, one in red and one in green, on each card. Keep the numbers as distinct as possible for beginners, but make the number series very similar for older or more advanced children. The phone numbers should be the numbers that the children are familiar with, for example six to seven digits or even the 12-digit numbers. You can make sure that all the children will have a turn making a continuous chain of numbers, with no repetition.
2. Copy the cardboard telephone for each child.

Procedure :

1. Mix the cards and give one to each child. Explain to the children that the red number is their own telephone number and the green number is the number of one of the other children.
2. Dial the green number on your card, repeating the numbers you dial. The children listen and look at the red numbers on their cards, to see if it is their number.
3. When a child hears his or her number, he or she picks up a phone and says hello, X here.
4. The child who answered the teacher's call dials the next number.
5. If a child dials a 'wrong' number, he or she must dial again. Similarly, a number not recognized by any of the other children must be repeated. The game ends when all the children have both dialed and answered the phone. The card can then be redistributed for a second round.

Variation : For advanced children, create a situation for the children to phone each other; they can order pizza, invite someone to a party, so on.

(Adapted from Games for Children)

Points to Reflect

1. Do you think you can apply these songs and games in your class? Why/why not?
2. What if the students get too noisy and out of control?
3. What if the school (the principal) forbids you from using this kind of stirring activities?

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Biodata:

During her time as an undergraduate student, B. Yuniar Diyanti enjoyed the teaching of English to young learners as one of her studies at Yogyakarta State University. Now, currently working as an English Education Lecturer at her alma mater, she is actively taking part in developing the teaching of English to young learners as a trainer for English teachers and class teachers of Elementary Schools in Yogyakarta. She is also

supervising and assisting her students who take English for Children program in conducting the teaching practice in Kindergarten and Elementary Schools.