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Language Teaching in Pre-primary Classroom

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Language helps us to communicate our thoughts and feelings, establish and maintain social contacts and relationships and understand our society and culture. Initially, children are not able to use language for all these things but as they grow older, their linguistic skills improve, and they start using language for all the above-mentioned purposes.

Almost all the activities of pre-school years involve conversation. Even while playing, children keep talking and commenting on their own actions. They also describe their daily activities and talk about their family and toys. Through these talks, they come in contact with new people and their acquaintance with others increases. Children learn to use language only when they actively participate in speaking and listening. Those children, who are motivated to speak and are listened to, demonstrate better linguistic abilities. In order to encourage linguistic development of children, it is necessary that our conversations are tailored to them. If they enjoy talking to us, they will show interest in learning the language and their vocabulary will also grow.

Keeping in mind some of these principles, we worked on the development of reading and writing skills of the children at the pre-school level. Various aspects of language learning were taken into consideration in the classroom, which created interest and enthusiasm in children and their use of dictionary also developed. We could also see amazing success in reading and writing skills among children of this level. Let us try to find out how various activities were carried out in the classroom while teaching language.

Teaching language
When children enter school, they already have a rich language of their own. Children of this age group express themselves better in their own language. Children understand their mother tongue well and are able to express in it. We can say that they have a good grip over their home language. Now, it is the responsibility of the teacher to motivate the child to learn the language of the school while also giving importance to his or her home language.

In the classroom, a lot of importance is given to the fact that children express themselves in their language. Their language, their thoughts are listened to with attention, respect and patience. At the same time, we (teachers) try to gradually change their language and ideas into the formal language of the school and the children slowly start connecting with the class and school. While listening to various poems, stories and during other activities, children are given the opportunity to speak and listen.

Learning to read In this way, plenty of practice was given on oral conversation, poetry and story for about three months at the beginning of the session. After this, the focus was shifted to the development of reading and writing skills. This process first started with a poem. Children were familiar with it.

[redacted]

The children knew this poem fairly well before coming to school having heard it from their mother, father or friends in their community.

This poem was recited in front of children with gestures, rhythm and acting. Alongside, the children also kept repeating it enthusiastically. This helped children to remember this poem while also acting it out. Now the children were singing the poem on their own with action. After two or three days, this poem was written on a chart paper and displayed in the classroom so that children could see the poem daily. The poem was taught by the teacher by placing a finger on each word of this poem for many days. Teachers placed the finger on the words and asked children about it again and again. They were also encouraged to read the words so that they could identify those words in print. The words that could be picturised were identified first, such as – [redacted] etc. Then they began to identify even the words that could not be picturised, such as, [redacted] etc.

After this, another poem was taken. The same method was adopted for this poem also. It was also written on a chart paper displayed in the classroom so that children could read it and identify the words in print. Gradually, children were able to identify certain words. After that, some selected words from both the poems were written on a chart paper and displayed. The children kept reading them and could identify the words.

[redacted]

Now, of these words, we picked words whose pictures could be drawn and made flashcards. These cards were read once daily. A reading game was designed in which the teacher held all the flashcards. The teacher would place the flashcard bearing the name of the object in front of the children. Looking at it, the children were asked to tell what was written on the card. Whichever child gave the answer first, the card would be given to her/him to keep it for some time. While doing so, it was also kept in mind that for the children, who were not

at the class level, easily identifiable cards would be shown. And the rest of the class was told to allow only those children to answer so that they could also get a card to keep.

The process of card reading went on continuously and the children learnt to read all the cards. After reading a card, the children wrote the words on the board and thus, also started learning to write. Furthering the same sequence, we continued the process of word identification by separating selected words from short poems and stories. Now we had many words that the children had identified.

Introducing matras

At this point, we faced a new challenge. The children were able to read only the words that they had already read and were not able to read the new, unfamiliar words. To overcome this challenge, we adopted the 'whole language teaching approach' along with working on recognition of letters. The words that the children had learnt were broken up into letters, for example, ■■■■ was broken into ■ ■ ■■; ■■■■ into ■ ■ ■■; ■■■■ into ■ ■■ ■; and ■■ into ■ ■; and they started identifying the letters. Thus, the process of alphabet recognition started from words itself. Children started participating enthusiastically in the process of identifying alphabets and soon started identifying alphabets on their own. In a matter of a few days, children had started identifying about 30–35 letters and tried to read new words by breaking them and guessing. We faced another challenge as we continued with this process. Children were able to identify and read the words, but they had difficulty in reading the words which had a matra. Some were able to read the words by guessing them, but some were not able to read the words, because they were unable to identify the matra.

Various interesting and fun activities were carried out to help them identify matra. For example, facial expressions proved to be a very effective tool in identifying ■ ■■ ■■■■■■ initially. After writing some words like ■■, ■■■■, ■■■ on the board, we pronounced them loudly and children carefully observed the facial expressions and lip movements while pronouncing that matra. Later, they also started to practice by imitating us. They knew very well the kind of facial expressions and lip movements one makes while saying ■ ■■ ■■■■■■ by carefully observing and listening to us. Some small words were picked up with which the children were familiar, such as – ■■■■ and by saying ■■■ and ■■■■, they started understanding the words with or without the matra ■. In this way, the children learnt to read words having the matra ■. Apart from this, we used the names of children, their parents and teachers for the matras of ■, ■, ■, ■, ■ and ■; such as Khileshwari, Kavita, Paridhi, Chitranshi, Anil, Vivek, Hetal, Keman, Sohail, Roshni etc. We could get most of the letters and ■■■■■■ in these names. By using names, children were able to relate to pronunciation very quickly and with that, they were able to think through and tell other words having similar pronunciations. While writing some words such as ■■■■ after ■■■■ or ■■■■ after ■■■■, children could read themselves by guessing the pronunciation of words on the basis of their structure. Some storylines were also created based on the frequency of a matra, where those matras were repeated. For example:

■■■■ ■■ ■■■■■ ■■ ■■■■■■ ■■■□ ■■ ■■■■ ■■■■■■ ■■■■■■■ ■■■■■■ ■■■□ ■■■■■■ ■■■ ■■■■■ ■■ ■■■■■■ ■■■■■■□ ■■■■■■ ■■ ■■■■■ ■■■■ ■■■□

Similarly, the story of Lalu-Peelu was narrated for the ■ matra. These stories were written on charts and put up in the classroom for children to look at and read throughout the day.

This is how we tried to develop the skills of reading and writing in the Hindi language in a joyful manner for the children of pre-primary classes through the play-way method of teaching. We hope that by the end of the session, about 9 out of 10 children will learn to read and write words/sentences of the Hindi language. We faced many challenges during this process and we could overcome these by talking with other teachers and taking feedback from the children. We felt that our challenges were nothing when compared to the great enthusiasm and interest the children displayed in learning.

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