Stick figures in the classroom

By Dhanya Bhaskaran | Jun 11, 2013

The author shows you how simple stick figure diagrams can be used in the classroom to enable contextualized learning.

‘Learning through fun’, ‘providing multi-sensory environment for effective learning’, ‘let the teacher be creative to make her students creative’, ‘contextualizing learning’ are some of the slogans that reverberate in the education scenario. So, what are all of them aiming at? If it’s to make the process of education an effective and lasting affair then these slogans do have very valid points. Education has to happen within meaningful contexts, in a child-friendly environment, through use of a multi-sensory approach, while catering to the individual needs of each child. In this context, it would be a good idea to talk about the scope of ‘stick figures’ in teaching and learning English (as a second language) in the Primary Classes.

What is stick-figure?

Here, these are stick figures and we have all have drawn these figures at some point in our lives.

So, how can we use them in our English language classroom?

When we talk about concepts, if we could support them by simple stick figure drawings, it can do wonders. For example, while teaching the concept ‘family’ the picture shown earlier can be used very effectively. Stick figure diagrams are easy for the children to add to as well thus enabling ‘participative learning’. Here, a picture speaks many words and a creative teacher can use this opportunity to add new vocabulary – he/she can even categorize them under different grammatical terms such as ‘nouns’ (proper nouns and abstract nouns), adjectives, adverbs etc. The figures need not be only of humans, it can represent many things around us.

In a story-telling session where students are to listen to the story being narrated, stick figures can be used to act as connectors to join the ideas in the story together. If drawn while the story is being listened to, the stick figures provide strong visual support to the auditory activity. They can also be used to gauge the comprehension of the learners by asking questions based on the drawings and serve as ‘vital clues’ to help the listeners ‘recollect meaningfully’ what has been listened to. Thus, the listening and comprehension activity become meaningful and contextual.

Another possibility is to explore visual clues to enhance speaking skills, especially if English is being taught as the second language. The teacher can present a single figure or a series of figures and ask the students to answer some questions based on them or create stories and narrate them to the rest of the class. The visual support the stick figures provide will help the student in the process.
Why stick figures?

Stick figures

- Are simple to draw and can be created on-the-spot.
- Create enthusiasm and trigger imagination and learner involvement.
- Can be used to provide multi-sensory learning experience.
- Provide symbolic representation of difficult concepts and help with contextualization.
- Add a visual context to new words learned thus enabling students to understand and remember new words and concepts better.

There are certain basic rules to be followed when using stick figure drawings in the classroom. These are:

a. Maintain consistency: Try drawing the same figure while talking about the same object at different times. If the teachers use different type of stick figures to represent the same concept, it could create confusion.

b. Avoid confusing surroundings: Avoid drawing unnecessary details, which may divert the attention from the main idea. Simple is best!

c. Maintain connectivity in sequential pictures: We tend to read from left to right (except in Arabic and a few similar languages) and top to bottom. So in sequential pictures the same consistency should be maintained to avoid any sort of confusion in the learners’ minds.

Who can use stick figures?

Any teacher can use stick figures and it need not be only for the primary classes. Even in higher classes, a teacher can utilize them to reveal a story which the students can build on and narrate in class or write about and then read out aloud (to work on spoken English, reading and writing skills).

So stick figures are for all learners of all age groups and also for all teachers to use. After all, there is no age restriction for fun!

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