

THE TEACHING OF POETRY: A CHANNEL FOR ENHANCING INTERACTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Education is not the learning of facts but the training of the mind to think (Albert Einstein). Critical thinking can lead to developing one's judgment, evaluation, and problem-solving abilities. If we come to the knowledge of the language, it has a crucial role in the growth of an individual. Language is not just the total of linguistic skills. It takes into account the linguistic competence of the learner. The traditional practice of language learning only through imitation and repetition must not be encouraged in the classrooms. Instead, the innate linguistic empowerment is addressed and reinforced. Learners should be enabled to develop linguistic proficiency to use language in various situations. Poetry undoubtedly occupies a special position among literary genres and it is the most imaginative and condensed expression of creative self-available in any language. "Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words" (Robert Frost). Reading poetry instills imagination, a sense of beauty, the power to empathize, and a deeper awareness of human nature and the human predicament. Thus, it enables the reader to become a better human being with a refined sensibility and fine taste. This paper tries to appraise the multi-faceted benefits of teaching poetry in English language classrooms through interaction. "Interaction is an important word for language experience and classroom... (R.N. Khan,2009). Though this paper an effective strategy for teaching poetry in equipping the learners with linguistic and creative ability is emphasized.

Keywords: Competence, Interaction, Strategy, Proficiency

Second Language Classroom

The teaching of any language is a very interesting activity in the hands of a good teacher. An effective teacher can put life in the teaching-learning program. Aims are very important in the teaching-learning process. For teaching any subject to the learners, aims are fixed up by the authorities. Regarding the aims of teaching English, Thomson and Wyatt (1952) say, "The Indian people must not only understand English when it is spoken or written, but also that he should himself be able to speak and write it". The teacher of English should aim at linguistic aims only. The systematic study of how learners acquire a second language is a fairly recent phenomenon, belonging to the second half of the twentieth century. Second language acquisition can be defined as how people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom (Rod Ellis). Literature and language are inseparable parts of second language acquisition. Among many other methods used in second language acquisition, poetry is a piece of literature used in the language classroom.

Poetry is an important mode of expression in language. Without the study of poetry, a person cannot be considered to be well-read in language. A subject that cannot captivate a person or arouse his feelings is not good. Poetry is that aspect of language which fundamentally provides entertainment to the readers. The teacher of poetry creates love for language learning. Without poetry, children will be doing language work without putting their heart and soul into it. By studying poems, the students can develop their power of imagination and aesthetic satisfaction. In the whole of language work, we find that poetry attracts the students. It gladdens their hearts and they feel all the more attracted towards it. They can feel the pleasure and appreciate the reality behind the poem. It is English poetry that makes the whole syllabus attractive and lovable for the students. Poetry helps the students to memorize a good deal of language material to a good extent. Thus, is because poetry can be memorized quickly compared to prose. By reading the poem repeatedly, the readers get a chance to get practice and at the same time, the patterns and sentences used in the poem can be registered in their minds. Philip Sidney is of the view that poetry is an imitation for a specific purpose, it is imitated to teach and delight. Pupils should learn poems, recite them and enjoy them. The teacher may not teach a poem which he/she does not appreciate. There must be a good selection of poems for the students. The teacher must be able to create conditions in the classroom through which the fullest possible significance of it is revealed. A teacher must be able to acquire the ability to teach a poem just like an art. The teacher should become one with the same feelings as the poet while teaching poetry. Model recitation by the teacher is very essential because it helps to attract the students towards the poem. But the detailed explanation of lines or words should be avoided. As far as a poem is concerned spelling of some words must not be taken up to seriously. Also, paraphrase the poem should be avoided. This will be suitable only for prose. The poem should be familiarized as a whole.

Suggested Steps for Teaching a Poem.

- Before giving an introduction about the poem the teacher can show a chart or a picture that can be made use of to create a proper atmosphere in the classroom.
- Teacher can spend enough time to initiate a discussion on the picture shown. Learners' participation must be encouraged.
- Through the discussion teacher can start with the theme and title of the poem. The picture or chart shown must be such that the theme of the poem can be elicited from the learners themselves.
- Model recitation can be done by the teacher once or twice with appropriate rhythm, word stress, proper body language, correct voice modulation, proper gestures and actions, wherever necessary. Audio CDs also can be made use of. The meaning of difficult words must be taken up and dealt with with the help of the active participation of learners.
- The teacher can ask some of the learners to recite the poem one by one. The teacher must be very careful to correct the mistakes if there are any.
- The teacher should give the learners enough chance to clarify their doubts. All the difficult areas must be clarified as per the need and requirement of the situation.
- A few comprehension questions can be asked by the teacher. This should be done with some hints or guidelines provided by the teacher.

- Finally, the home assignment can be given. This may be writing a small poem based on a similar theme or learning of the poem by heart.

In most cases, teachers find the teaching of poetry as a chore. A teacher must aim at gaining knowledge and skills, the deepening of understanding, the development of problem- solving or changes in perceptions, attitudes, values, and behavior. The majority of students will tell that poetry is boring; it's too hard to understand. A teacher may be confused to identify what the poem meant. The surest way to kill an appreciation of poetry is to reduce it into questions like what is the meaning of the title, pick out the figurative language, what is the poet trying to say and how does the language suggest this, etc. The teaching and learning of poetry are considered to be difficult because of three reasons. First, it's hard because of nature and its characteristics how it is studied, how the experts think and communicate about it. Second, the ways the content is taught can make it difficult. Teachers treat prose and poetry alike. Finally, the textbook writers include poems that do not suit the mental age of the learners, and the content not including background knowledge and relevant experiences of the learners. The present position of teaching poetry must be changed. In a large number of schools, the teacher dictates the summary or the main ideas of the poem. In some cases, poems are simply translated into their mother- tongue. Very few teachers are interested in teaching poetry.

Pre-reading activities

Poem: 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening by Robert Frost

Teaching aids A chart depicting woods covered with snow and a horse with its rider, a pointer, a roller blackboard colored chalk, etc.

Thought content: Robert Frost, the great poet of nature is attracted by the natural beauty and loveliness of the woods. He thinks of enjoying the beauty of the sight. As he has to do important work at his farm, he could not stop there any longer. The main idea is that duty is important than the enjoyment of life.

Testing the previous knowledge:

The teacher can ask the following questions to test the previous knowledge.

- i) Name some of the poems that you have read.
- ii) Which is the poem that you liked most?
- iii) Recite that poem.
- iv) Have you read the poem "stopping by woods on a snowy evening?"

Presentation: The teacher displays the chart and gives chances for the students to say about the picture. Through the responses from the students, the teacher creates a proper atmosphere in the classroom for teaching the poem.

While –reading activities

The teacher gives a model recitation of the poem. The teacher can use gestures whereas possible. Let the students keep their books closed at this time. After this, the teacher can ask

the students to open the text and engage them in the following while-reading activities. The students may be ready to read and study the text that they are supposed to deal with. They are going to develop a purposeful interaction between the text and its readers.

It is indeed very advantageous if the teacher has a good voice quality and a dramatic sense while reading the text. This will help the students to feel the language, its rhythm, intonation, sounds, etc. if it is too long, the teacher can read some of the interesting sections which will encourage them to read the whole. Now it is the turn of the students to read first silently and then loudly, individually, in pair or group. The teacher can then ask them to mark the difficult words or expressions in the text and help them to find out the meanings. After reading, the students will be energetic to know that they have formed some clear ideas about the poem before actually going through it.

Post-reading activities

This is meant to create a suitable situation for the students to express their reactions to reading the text this will not only deepen their understanding of the text but also generate interest in the creative use of the language. Some of the activities are:

i) Comprehension questions: the teacher can ask comprehension questions to assess how far the students have understood the text

- What are “harness bells”?
- Why does the horse shake his harness bells?
- What other sounds alone can be heard in the woods?
- My little horse will think ‘it’ queer. What does ‘it’ mean here?

Students may be asked to give the answers either orally or in writing and the teacher can go through the answers & make necessary corrections.

ii) Language exercises

A variety of language exercises can be introduced in the class. Some of the language exercises focusing on any four skills of language learning are:

Giving antonyms of the selected words and phrases, changing certain lines into passive voice, etc. (Eg: - “He will not see me stopping here”). The teacher can also ask the students to put the line in the usual prose order (Eg:- “Whose woods these are I think I know”)

iii) Memorization

This is a useful pedagogical tool, especially regarding poetry. Memorization allows the students to ‘feel’ and experience language. It is a profound source of ‘spiritual nourishment. If the poem is lengthy, some interesting lines or stanzas could be memorized and it is a very fruitful & rewarding experience.

(iv) Creative activities

Re-writing exercises and role-playing are two creative activities that the teacher can introduce to enhance the students' understanding and appreciation of the poem for the improvement of their expressive and receptive skills. Re-writing activities may be 'free' or controlled. In the 'free' activities, students enjoy expressing what they have understood from the text in their own words. They may be asked to summarize the poem in a fixed number of words or to re-write the text with a different ending. They are supposed to use the grammar structures in the original poem and adapt all the elements to writing about their own identity, thus creating a new poem, in role-playing, students asked to assume different roles. They get an opportunity to experiment with non-verbal communicative aspects of language like body language, gestures, and facial expressions, along with intonation, rhythm, stress, slang, and idiomatic expressions. As Tomlinson (1986) points out "poems which express strong emotions, attitudes, feelings, opinions or ideas are usually more 'productive' than those which are gentle, descriptive or neutral" (P.36). Such activities help students gain self-confidence and self-esteem.

'Editorial theory and practice' (G. Bornstein, 1996) into the classroom can be used as a means to the effective teaching of poetry. "Editorial theory and practice" means asking the students to think and then act as if they were scholarly editors. Asking students like this, they are allowed to confront several crucial interpretive and practical issues –some of which they have not encountered before. Editorial theory and practice help to create experiential learning opportunities for students.

The most influential approach to the teaching and learning of poetry is emphasizing multimodality, which is increasingly renowned as an effective way of enhancing students' engagement. Multimodality is defined as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined". (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001 P-20) A multi-modal poetry teaching methodology is seen as having the potential to be effective in boosting student's engagement. Teachers can blend a variety of techniques and resources in order not just to engage their students with poetry but also to activate language learning. Multimodal approach can act as a springboard for the development of student's language proficiency and creative engagement. The blending of visual and print media is perhaps the most popular form of multimodality.

CONCLUSION

There are various strategies and methods for teaching a poem in a language classroom. Whatever strategies a teacher adopts in the class, the aim is that students gain a fuller understanding of the text and linguistically and conceptually prepare themselves to study it for cognition, interpretation, and evaluation. They also learn how to derive the meaning of a text and from a semantic chain from the keywords, examine how language is used to describe a setting, and create desired effects. It will also help them find ways to transfer the text and reconstruct its specific and literal meaning. Thus, they gain the ability to read a poem critically as a creative expression with aesthetic sensibility.

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