

NEED TO RESOLVE ISSUES AND REORGANIZE COMPOSITION CLASSES - A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Language can never be taught but can always be caught, is an axiom. This only means that the learners take the lion's share of responsibility and credit in language learning. Teachers are facilitators providing learners with opportunities to catch language. Nevertheless, Environment plays quite a serious role in drafting the success or failure story of the individual learners involved in the big game of Language learning. English which is essentially a foreign language is now being learnt as a second language. The difference in terminology is not ignorable. The high status of English as a second language is a rosy picture on paper. In reality, The First Language enjoys the support of Environment and the second suffers from lack of Environmental support. To put it technically precise, L1 enjoys acquisition rich Environment and L2 is being taught and learnt in acquisition poor environment. This heightens the responsibilities of the teacher. Transfer of knowledge that happens so smoothly in the case of L1, struggles for footholds in the case of L2. Development of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills cannot be carried out if the learning environment fails to favor learning of the target language. Writing, being the ultimate skill that can be acquired only by paying due attention to the other three skills, suffers. In this context the concept of Composition Classes gains all importance. This article closely examines the reason for failure of Composition Classes as a technique in schools and in colleges and insists upon the need to resolve issues pertaining to it in order to reorganize composition classes effectively and beneficially.

KEYWORDS: Acquisition Rich Environment- An Environment That Favours Language Learning`

Acquisition poor environment-Environment that hinders language learning

Transfer of knowledge- Ability to transfer knowledge from language learning situation to language using situation.

Foreign language- Language that is learnt for its intrinsic value.

Second language- Language that is learnt for its utility value.

Target language- The language that one aspires to learn.

INTRODUCTION

Listening, Speaking, reading and writing is the natural order in acquiring language skills. This is the order in which skills are acquired in mother tongue. The child listens to the sounds produced by people around and tries to imitate them. Reading consolidates the knowledge acquired and Writing completes the task. One of the reasons why people find

teaching and learning of English difficult is that the order is almost reversed. English language learning begins with writing. The learners are introduced to shapes of the letters before they familiarize themselves with the sounds. Moreover Listening, Speaking, Reading are skills that have gone unrecognized for fairly a long period of time. Only with the advent of Language lab efforts are made to improve these three skills, namely Listening, Speaking and Reading. But Composition classes are to be viewed as testimonial recognition of the fact that language learning is an exercise in the development of skill. Unfortunately the efforts had only proved to be insufficient and had not yielded fruit. That the Composition classes had obviously been a failure is evident from the fact that the students at the senior secondary level are not able to draft letters to meet out their personal or academic requirements. They sadly depend on others for the accomplishment of simple language based tasks. Yet Composition classes cannot be discarded for want of a better alternative. Therefore, it's worthwhile to contemplate upon issues pertaining to composition with a view to reorganize Composition classes as an effective tool for developing writing skills. The prerequisite condition is that in order to be a good writer one will have to necessarily be a good listener, a good speaker and a good reader. Undoubtedly only a good listener can become a good speaker, only a good speaker can be a good reader and only a good listener, speaker and a reader can become a good writer. Therefore, efforts to enhance the exposure to these skills in the target language should be constantly and consistently made. However, this article focuses its attention on improving the quality of the composition hours in schools and colleges for effective implementation of it as a tool to enhance the writing skills of the L2 learners.

Discussion of the Issues to be Resolved:

What are the factors responsible for failure of composition is the very fundamental question for which crystal clear answer should be obtained to initiate any reorganization. Composition classes have failed primarily due to lack of enthusiastic support of the people concerned; the Learners, the Teachers, the Management and the Parents. To put it in other word attitudinal failure has to be counted as one of the factors defeating the purpose of the composition. In the minds of the learners a positive attitude towards composition will have to be developed. They must feel convinced that it is only in the composition house, their needs and requirements are fulfilled and real learning in the meaningful sense of the term takes place. What is learned in the composition hours is something very relevant to their personal and professional development. Once this understanding occurs, the learners would not hesitate to make the best of their efforts to accomplish the task assigned to them.

Teachers are scared of composition classes because of its aftermath. Correction is quite a tedious task. Reading a piece of writing in faulty English in order to rectify the errors is quite a labor. In a class of 40, if a student commits 5 mistakes, $40 \times 5 = 200$ mistakes are to be pointed out and rectified. Teachers in their effort to escape the inescapable evil write the whole composition on the black board asking the students to copy that down in their notebook. This has to be regarded a nasty practice because it defeats the very purpose of Composition. Instead, teachers can work their way out differently. Imposing topics for the learners is one wrong step that teachers can easily avoid. The proven fact about writing is that you can write only when you want to write. Therefore, selecting topics for composition can be done through discussion. Say for that matter if on Friday the students are to take their composition class, the selection can be made on Monday. From Monday onwards every day some five to ten minutes can be spent on discussing the topics. Yes, there must be chaos. Students should be given a chance to choose from a variety of topics. Topics on Social, Scientific, Sports, Literary, philosophical issues can be given to the matured and trained writers. Personalizing the topic would help the

beginners to make their efforts with confidence. IF YOU WERE THE CHIEF MINISTER, IF YOU WERE A GIRL and the like would set them free from the pressure of formal preparation and might even polish up their faculty of imagination. When they have nothing to say, they will say nothing. These are topics on which they will always have something to say. Therefore, they are very useful as icebreakers. Classroom discussion of the topic provides the slow learners with ideas as well as expressions. From Monday to Friday they get sufficient time to prepare themselves for the task. Teachers can introduce few words and can even train the students to use them in appropriate contexts. This way, a fair idea of the task can be given to the students' gradually instilling confidence in them. The teachers can repeat the spelling and stress upon the preposition or article so that the students would not go wrong with those items.

In fact, teachers can organize oral composition and picture composition frequently to provide the learning community with a wide range of learning experiences. From guided composition of the free composition transition should be smooth and gradual. The mechanics of writing should be taught to the students. Training should be given to the students in the four phases of writing, namely Planning, Translating, Reviewing and Editing. The ultimate aim of composition writing is to bring out the originality and creativity of the learners. Yet at the initial stage, teachers should teach them the basics of writing so that gradually they stand on their own by and by. Catching the forefinger of the father the child learns to walk. It's obligatory on the part of the parent to walk along. Mere instructions wouldn't work. Teachers will have to teach the students how effective note of the Introduction can be drawn using certain techniques like the few mentioned below

Introduction Using a Quotation or a Proverb

Quotes and proverbs are effective means of Introduction. An essay on Education for example, can be introduced with the employment of quotes like Education is the manifestation of Perfection that already exists in Man by Swami Vivekananda. Quotes by eminent Educationists like Tagore or Gandhi.

Introduction Using an Anecdote

Anecdotes are short instances of long touching significance. A. G. Gardiner uses anecdotes to introduce his topics. His essay On Saying Please begins with an anecdote of a lift man who hurls a passenger out of the lift for refusing to say please. The act of the lift man is a punishable offense. There is no law that compels the people to say sorry or please or thank you. Yet, the author relates saying these words are like the oil that can keep the machine of life run smoothly and therefore nobler than any written or unwritten law. Another essay by the author, on the rule of the Road begins with an anecdote of a stout lady walking in the middle of the road. The author uses this anecdote to drive home his point that the road rules are hard and fast rules that are not to be broken.

Introduction using a question

Introduction can also be developed using a question. K. M. Munshi opens his essay Foundations of Indian Culture with a significant question what is Culture? Francis Bacon opens his essay on Of Truth with a question what is Truth? Raising a question and answering it is one way of developing an essay. Teachers should take pains to teach this to the students.

Affirmative and Negative Note

Introduction to Essays can be developed in a note of affirmation or negation. For example an essay on My Favorite Leader can introduce in a note of affirmation like I am interested in reading biographies and autobiographies of great leaders. I admire and adore quite a number of leaders. To pick one among them as my favorite is quite a task. Yet if I am compelled to name one I would rather say...

The same essay can be introduced in a negative note. I am not interested in politics. I do not know much about any leaders. In fact, I cannot name any as my favorite leader in the true sense. Yet if I am compelled I would rather say. Is my favorite leader.

The same is applicable for any topic under the sun. An essay on Rainy Day can begin in an affirmative note like there are very few pleasures in the world that can be compared to the pleasure of getting drenched in rain. The same can begin in negative note as Very few inconveniences in the world can be as exasperating and irritating as getting drenched in rain. One can go on and on. The point is, instead of merely directing the students to compose their ideas in three sections, namely Introduction, Trunk and Conclusion; teachers would do well to teach the learners how to develop Introduction, Trunk and Conclusion.

Developing **the trunk of the essay** needs training in the expository functions of language like Description, narration, comparison, argumentation, persuasion etc. It's not a stage that learners can cross without the help of a teacher. Therefore, teachers should be ready to walk that extra mile with the students in order to achieve their target.

The note of **Conclusion** can be written in two styles 1. Open-ended. 2. Closed. The first leaves it to the understanding of the reader. It's the readers who need to infer and arrive at a possible conclusion. But in the later the author concludes with his own words, leaving very little to the imagination of the readers. Mulk Raj Anand's **The Lost Child**, hailed highly as a poem in prose by critics, is a classic example of open-ended conclusion. Nevertheless to present a practical example, if after discussing the atrocities of the modern politicians the author concludes his essay on Independent India with a disturbing question ' Is it for this that the Mahatma, the father of our Nation and millions and millions of our brothers and sisters sacrificed their lives?', The author seeks open-ended conclusion. Instead, if the author concludes saying that the sacrifices of our leaders have been rendered null and void by the shameless, selfish politicians of modern times, he seeks closed conclusion. Students should be sufficiently trained in both the styles of conclusion.

Returning to the point about attitudinal change, change in the attitude on the part of the teachers can bring in the desired change in the attitude of the students. When the teachers begin to look at every mistake committed by the students as an opportunity given to him to teach something, the students will develop a willingness to commit mistakes and learn. Management should stop insisting on a number. Composition is not a quantitative exercise. It is qualitative. A teacher may be able to complete ten compositions in one class, but may be able to complete five in another. Truly number means nothing. How well those five compositions are done should be the real concern of the management. Parents should see to it that their awards show keen interest in Composition writing.

CONCLUSIONS

Writing as a skill can be developed only when the learners receive instruction in the four phases of writing; Planning, Translating, Reviewing and Editing. Obviously the spirit of the composition classes can be regained if and only if the teachers, students, management and the parents come together to shoulder their shares of responsibility. There is no

point in contemplating upon discarding the system when there is no better alternative for it. Composition classes will have to be reorganized and used more effectively with modification in point of perception.

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