

Right Start Training Programme for Asha Teachers 2014: English Literacy and Self-Teaching

Literacy skills can give a big boost to language learning by letting us hold onto the otherwise fleeting utterance to contemplate its structures and meanings. Yet many English learners are discouraged from striving for literacy by the notorious variability of English spelling.

Self-teaching is possible when a subject can be organized in a logical or self-evident way, so that knowing the principle of order one can interpret individual units within it. The apparent randomness of English spelling has led to the practice of rote memorization of vocabulary, which depends on the teacher pronouncing every single word for the students.

While variable spelling is indeed a formidable barrier to literacy even for native English-speaking children, there are spelling regularities characterizing many thousands of words. Not only can these regularities be taught, but students can be taught procedures for discovering them, i.e., for self-teaching.

How to do this was the main subject of the Right Start workshop. In addition, there were literacy-building activities using songs and a book collection.

Workshop Outline

23-05-14

| Topics | Activities |
|--|---|
| Self-teaching and literacy; the 3 components of reading skill; word identity: sound + meaning + spelling | |
| The Tamil Alphabet - an intrinsically ordered subject | Finding the range and sequence of vowel and consonant sounds by place of articulation; identifying the symbols in sequence. Colouring and displaying the symbols. |
| The English Alphabet -- a topic that needs to be organized by the teacher | Colouring and displaying the symbols. Finding the symbols in a display by singing the ABC song. "Stop the music" game. |
| The English vowels -- another topic for the teacher to organize | Alphabet card game: Vowels are winners. Participants in groups played and then created new games with the cards. |
| Speed speech practice-- my/your | Q & A ball game |

23-05-14, cont'd

| Topics | Activities |
|---|--|
| Teaching songs to develop listening skills; the many uses of song in language teaching | <p>Song: "Bingo" and discussion: "Bingo" may be used to teach phonics (the 4 sounds of A); grammar (tenses of "have" and "is"); Tamil-English contrasts (English use of "his", not "its", for an animal)</p> <p>Participants in groups made flashcards with the words of the song and used them to build sentences.</p> <p>More songs: The Rooster Song, Do you know the number....?, Lazy Mary, Pick a bale of cotton, Everybody loves Saturday night, Looby Lou, Go in and out the window</p> <p>Participants in groups discussed the teaching uses of these songs and gave presentations.</p> |
| Reading-time -- using easy-to-read, repetitive texts builds reading speed and helps secure word knowledge | Reading activity -- Participants in groups shared small books and completed a word-study and reader-response activity. |

25-05-2014

| Topics | Activities |
|---|---|
| Phonetics and spoken language, phonics and written language; accent-varieties of spoken English; the universality of written language | Listening and writing dictation, without written text, to 10 accents of English, from India, Australia, South Africa, 4 regions in the UK, 3 regions in the US; next, listening with written text to relieve doubts and clarify meanings. |
| Phonics topics -- high frequency spellings vs. rare spellings; self-teaching of high-frequency spellings | Bingo game with words containing "C"s. Finding the S, K, and CH sounds. Sorting the words by sound; finding the spelling regularities (c + h = CH; c + e, i, y = S, etc.) |
| Phonics topics -- high frequency vowel spellings; long and short vowels; self-teaching of short-vowel patterns | Sorting word-picture cards by sound and spelling and finding the short vowel spelling norms (--VC words; --VCC words/syllables; --VC syllables) |
| Songs for teaching -- question forms, yes and no answers, action commands, prepositions, etc.; songs and dances | Arranging song-text flash cards; sentence-building activity based on "Do you know...?"; 3 danceable songs from the previous session |
| Reading-time | Same activity as on 23-05-14. |

| Topics | Activities |
|--|--|
| Phonics review -- long and short vowels; other phonics categories; charting new vocabulary words by phonics category to facilitate students' discovery of spelling generalizations | A phonics overview of the vocabulary used in the Standard 1 Samacheer Kalvi Maths/EVS textbook; games with long and short vowel word sets (colours, foods, animals, actions) |
| Words with rare and unique spellings; syllable stress and unstressed vowels | Discussion of how to present irregular words to students (important words like eye and heart, and common-usage words like any and many); a clapping rhyme (A sailor went to sea) with rhythmic difficulties that can be overcome by attending to syllable stress |
| Using songs to teach advanced topics; reading multisyllabic words using syllable breaks | Accentuate the positive - multisyllabic words Everybody said (but nobody did) - indirect speech Billy Boy - the issue of child marriage |
| Reading-time | Book-making |
| Concluding topics: teaching slow learners, the value of bilingual reading; the value of reflective writing | |

Resources

Self-teaching and literacy

Ehri, Linnea (N.D.): Learning to spell: A challenge for elementary students with LD.
www.greatschools.org/special-education/LD-ADHD/1021-spelling-elementary-students-with-ld.gs

Gaskins, Irene et al. (2004): Analyzing words and making discoveries about the alphabetic system: Activities for beginning readers.
www-tc.pbs.org/teacherline/courses/rdla165/docs/c4s5_21analyzingwords.pdf

Phonics norms

Fry, Edward (1985): Phonics: A large phoneme-grapheme frequency count revised.
<http://jlr.sagepub.com/content/36/1/85>

ESL and song

Tune in to English (N.D.): Links to articles [by Suzanne Medina and others about using songs in language classes]. www.tuneintoenglish.com/?page_id=21293

Reading-time in primary school classrooms

See Beth Newingham's blog at Scholastic.com for many ideas, e.g., using a Reader's Notebook:
www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2009/11/readers-notebook