TEAM-WORD WEB FOR YOUNG LEARNERS' SOCIAL AND PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

Tina Priyantin

tina.priyantin1212@unpak.ac.id.

Department of English Education, University of Pakuan – Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Encouraging and engaging children in language learning need very high efforts as they develop very quickly, have a short attention span and so need variety. The choice of topics is important, but it should be built on and extended so that the learners can learn something new. The learning process should also be fun, but it should have a purpose or a goal, and that have an end-product that the learners can feel proud of. Positive environment should be created by teachers, since young language learners need to feel successful when using English, have plenty of opportunities to communicate especially with their classmates, and make them know they have achieved something worthwhile. Any techniques will do if they are appropriate with the characteristics of the young language learners. *Team-Word Web* in Cooperative Learning is one of the techniques which gives an opportunity for young learners to work in groups, and build their social skill. Moreover, it also facilitates them in achieving their productive skills because this technique focuses more on speaking and writing ability.

Keywords: *young learners, cooperative learning, social skills, productive skills*

Introduction

All children are highly motivated in learning language if the process is surrounded by love and attention, and supported by encouragement and engagement. When those aspects are combined, the children will continuously make any attempts to communicate. However, the way the children learn a foreign language as well as the way teaching them, obviously depends on their developmental stage. A teacher should recognize the characteristics of children in different ages, as well as their interests and the linguistic skills.

In learning a home language, the children probably won't get any pressures; any mistakes will be accepted. However, when it comes to the moment when they should communicate in English at school, the atmosphere will be different. English becomes a compulsory subject to be learnt quickly. The pressure might appear not only from the teacher, but may also originate with other children, the school system, and their parents. The conditions make a distinction between acquisition and learning, in which the former is subconscious and anxiety free, while the second is conscious process where separate items from the language are studied and practiced in turn (Harmer, 2012).

Therefore, Krashen in Harmer (2012) suggested that teachers should concentrate on acquisition rather than learning and that the role of the language teacher should be to provide

the right kind of language exposure, namely comprehensible input. For children, the language experience should be designed in an anxiety-free environment to create unconscious condition for them to acquire new language, but the teacher still needs to broaden the range of experiences such as systematizing the learning process, helping develop thinking skills, and ultimately, empowering students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Developing Children in Language Learning

Basically, children are better learners than adults, but the capacity in developing various learning skills and strategies are not as good as adults. Older people can learn patiently, choose the course themselves, and have specific purposes in learning such as for fulfilling the work requirements and for traveling, and therefore they will be more committed and motivated.

When young children come to the language classroom, they bring with them an already well-established set of instincts, skills, and characteristics which will help them to learn another language (Halliwell, 2010). However, they might find difficulties in following verbal instructions and detailed information. They tend to just guess anything in general message. Therefore, a language teacher should support and develop the skills by using gesture, intonation, demonstration, actions, and facial expressions to convey the meaning and help children understand.

Moreover, children have a shorter concentration span than adults, but they can spend hours absorbing activities that really interest them, and it's easier to motivate them and raise their enthusiasm. Some very important resources of interest for young learners in the classroom include pictures, stories, songs, and games, which can also give good stimulus on all learning styles including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Although young learners have limited language resources, they are creative with grammatical forms as well as concepts. Their creativity is often unpredictable, and it could appear even without the teacher's help, but because of their human instinct. To support their creative language skill, a teacher is suggested to provide them fun and challenging activities which give them more opportunities to express themselves. A teacher isn't just asking young learners to repeat set phrases, but is encouraging them to construct language actively for themselves so they can build a desire to communicate.

The last important thing a teacher should consider in developing language skill is the children's instinct for interaction and talk. Basically, children love and need to talk to practice the use of the language. The only way to learn to use language is by using it as often as possible. It is one of the most powerful motivators for using the language, and therefore a teacher should

make sure that the desire to talk is working for learning, not against the learning (Halliwell, 2010:8). Young learners should be given more opportunities to talk and interact with their peers, and putting them in pairs or group works is the best way to facilitate them.

To sum up, teachers should consider these things in teaching young learners, adapted from Scott and Ytreberg (2010). The first is words are not enough, which means that most activities don't rely on spoken words only but should include movement and involve the senses. The second is let the pupils talk to themselves and play with the language like making up rhymes, singing songs and telling stories.

Moreover, teachers should create varieties in activity, pace, organization, and voice, as young learners have a short concentration and attention span. Routines and repetition are also beneficial for young learners to know the rules and be familiar with the situations. Rewards and prizes must be avoided, but other forms of encouragement should be applied. Grouping the children to encourage cooperation, not competition, can create an atmosphere of involvement and togetherness.

Grammar for young learners should be introduced but with the barest minimum of grammar taught. A teacher should create interesting and enjoyable activities, but with the target grammar items to be taught, and make the children unconscious that they also learn grammar implicitly. The last is dealing with assessment, in which for children, they don't need formal one, but it is useful for the teacher to make regular notes about each child's progress.

Cooperative Learning for Young Learners

In terms of young learners' needs to develop language, there are various techniques a teacher may apply. Group working has been a common one to create a condition in which students have an opportunity to talk to each other. However, it often happens that not all students get engaged and learning might not be equal as one person in the group may do all or most of the tasks.

Cooperative Learning (CL) is one of the methods which also puts the students in groups, but it gives more benefits for student-student interactions. Olsen and Kagan in Kessler (1992) stated that CL offers more opportunity for language development and for integrating language with content through increased active communication (active use of language both comprehending and producing), increased complexity of communication, and use of language for academic and social functions.

Furthermore, what makes CL different from group work is they have specific elements which are abbreviated into PIES (*Positive interdependence, Individual accountability, Equal*

participation, and Simultaneous interaction). The elements are considered useful for young learners in dealing with their needs in language development.

Positive interdependence, as described by Olsen and Kagan in Kessler (1992), occurs when the gains for one individual are associated with gain for others; that is, when one student achieves, others benefit, too. All members in the teams depend on each other but in positive ways. Each student has their own individual task but they are responsible to support the team task. Each of them may not go on to the next activity until all team members accomplish the task, in which it is called by *individual accountability*. Those two elements really build students' social skills in learning, especially for young learners who will learn how to support and care for each other.

Moreover, *equal participation* in a team can also help young learners learn about the meaning of fairness. Each member will have equal task to learn together, but still needs to be responsible for the group task. *Simultaneous interaction* is the most crucial element in CL as it has been described that young learners need to talk and interact with each other. When it is done continuously, young learners will be engaged and they can develop the language learning fast.

Team-Word Web

There have been various kinds of techniques or structures in CL, proposed by a few experts in ELT, with different functions or domains of usefulness. Orr (1999) stated that the structural approach to cooperative learning is based on the creation, analysis, and systematic application of *structures*, or content-free ways of organizing social interaction in the classroom.

A teacher of young language learners should analyze very carefully which structures suit best for the students' characteristics. A structure should provide a learning experience with three aspects including cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domain. The cognitive and psychomotor deal with the receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills, while affective relates to the social skills.

Jigsaw, Numbered-Head Together, Think-Pair-Share, and Three-Step Interview, are examples of structures in CL which have been very popular, and there are still more structures which have been designed with various function and usefulness. The four skills are applied in most of the structures, but in CL it focuses most on productive skills.

Team-Word Web (TWW) is also one of the structures that is considered effective to build young learners' social and productive skill. Kagan in Orr (1999) described that the structure helps young learners analyze concepts into components, understand multiple relations among ideas, differentiate concepts (academic functions), and role-taking (social function)

In TWW, students are divided into some groups consisting of 5-6 members, depending on the size of the students in the class. Each member of the group is given numbers of 1 to 5 or 6. The teacher gives a topic, for example about 'describing wild animals', and each group is provided a piece of paper. The teacher may decide the name of animals for each group to be described, or the groups may decide themselves. They write the name of the animals in the circle in the middle of the paper and draw 5-6 lines to form a spider web and a bubble at the edge of each line. After that, the activities of writing information in the web are started.

The teacher mentions student 1 to start creating a sentence to describe about the animal, e.g.: *A lion has four legs*, and he/she is given only 10-15 seconds to do it (depending on the level of the students). Next, student 2 is mentioned and should continue to construct a sentence, and then student 3 continues, until all members get their turns. The example of the TWW product is shown in *figure 1.1*. For the higher-level students, the activity can be done in two rounds, which mean each student should write two sentences so there will be 10 to 12 sentences in the web. At the end, all members in the group should present orally and that's the time the teacher assesses the students' productive skill, in terms of speaking ability.
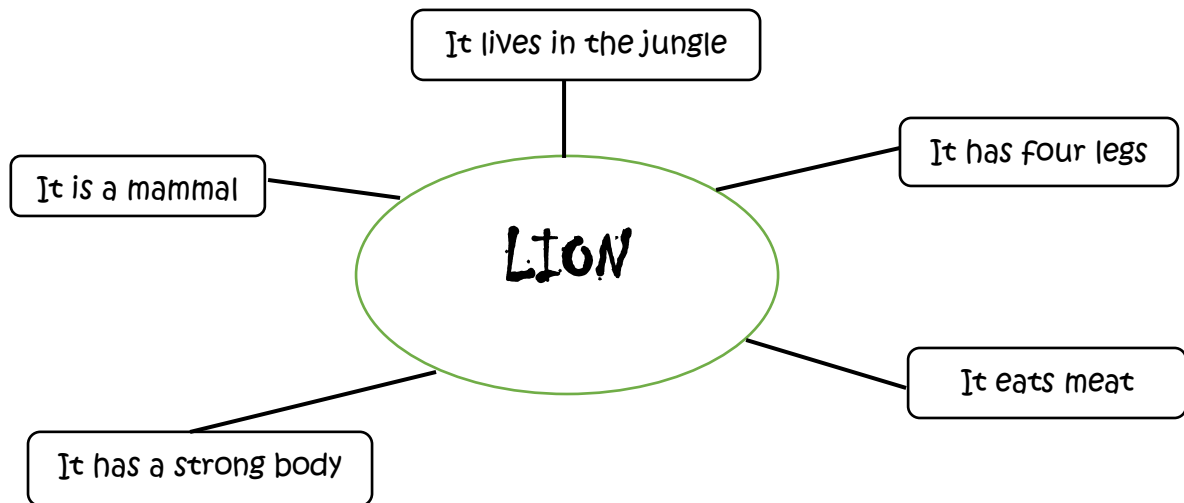

Figure 1.1. Example of Team-Word Web product

Building Social and Productive Skills

Word-Webbing, or people often call it as a Spider Web, is actually a common technique, but the special thing from Team-Word Web is that it is done in cooperative group and each student participates. Each of them creates their own sentences, but they have to cooperate each other to accomplish the group task. When one member cannot construct a sentence, others should help, as it is related to CL elements of positive interdependence and individual accountability. In this case, children will learn much how to be responsible, care, and helpful. They will also learn how to be build patience and tolerance when one member cannot finish the task. This really can build young learners' social skills in learning. However, the teacher should also 'think on their feet' when problems appear so the social skill will be built simultaneously.

Moreover, with this technique, young learners may also build their speaking and writing ability, although in simple ways. Constructing sentences is one of the ways to practice writing, and the simple presentation helps them develop their speaking ability although most students probably only read the sentences they have written. However, for children, both activities are such challenging moments that they can unconsciously build their productive skills in language learning. Therefore, a teacher should emphasise meaning rather than focus on accuracy of the language that the students are producing – although we, of course, try to make sure that they do things properly (Harmer, 2012). Listening to what young learners want to say, appreciating what they write, and encouraging them through praise, rather than correcting their mistakes all the time, also enhance their confidence and self-esteem.

Conclusion

There must be considerations a teacher has to think in applying a method or a teachnique. To apply Team-Word Web, a teacher of young learners need to consider the children's current interests, learning styles, and also the ability level. Not all children are willing to work in groups, and therefore it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate them. Facilitating young learners in pair or group work really develops strong relations among them. In addition, interesting topics with fun activities must be given in each session to encourage young learners to get involved. Engaging young learners with interesting topics is one of the key factors in the success of teaching productive skill. At the end, a teacher musn't ignore to monitor the young learners' task, and give feedback as well as the follow-up, so that they can have a final product that they can be proud of.

REFERENCES

Aaron, J.E. (2008). *The little, Brown essential handbook*. New York. Pearson Education, Inc.

Barkley, E.F. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: a handbook for college faculty*. San Fransisco. Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, E.G., et al. (2004). *Teaching cooperative learning: the challenge for teacher education*. New York. State University of New York Press.

Fraenkel, J.R., and Wallen, N.E. (2007). *How to design and evaluate research and education*. New York. McGraw-Hill Education.

Freeman, D.L. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, G.M. et al. (1997). *Cooperative Learning: A sourcebook of lesson plans for teacher education on cooperative learning*. San Clemente. Kagan Cooperative Learning.

Halliwell, S. (2010). *Teaching English in the primary classroom*. Essex. Pearson Education Limited.

Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*. Essex. Pearson Education Limited.

Harmer, J. (2012). *Essential teacher knowledge: core concepts in English Language Teaching*. Essex. Pearson Education Limited.

Harmer, J. (2016). *The practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex. Pearson Education Limited.

Kessler, C. (1992). *Cooperative learning language: a teacher's resource book.* New Jersey. Prentice Hall, Inc.

Orr, J.K. (1999). *Growing up with English*. Washington DC. Office of English Language Programs United States, Department of State.

Phillips, S. (2003). *Young learners*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Scott, W.A, and Ytreberg, L.H. (2010). *Teaching English to children*. Essex. Pearson Education Limited.

Slattery, M., and Willis, J. (2003). *English for primary teachers: a handbook of activities and classroom language*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.