

Class Performance, A Step toward An Authentic Assessment in Teaching English to Young Learners

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Abstract

Communicative language teaching leads language learners to be able to use the language in real-life or real-life like situations. Through the learning activities, the learners are facilitated to use the language for communicative performance in the target language. Class performance is one of the activities enabling the learners to use their knowledge and to apply their skills in the demanded communication event(s). The performance provides a situation where learners can develop different skills. During the performance tasks, the teacher can observe, monitor and at the same time, the teacher can get ideas to prepare an authentic assessment. To deal with these pedagogical issues in teaching English to young learners (TEYL), the writer of this paper discusses the benefits of performance, the practice of class performance in TEYL and some insights for a performance and authentic assessment.

Keywords: performance, authentic assessment, young learners

1. Introduction

A teacher's teaching paradigm influences much the process of teaching and learning in his/her class. A teacher applying communicative language teaching directs the classroom procedures to help the students to use the language learned as a means of communication. The teacher helps design learning activities in such a way that the students have an opportunity to get and use the language skills in real-life or real-life like situations in student-centered learning. Being able to use the language is one of the evidences of the learning achievement of the students.

It is a challenge that young learners who learn English-as a foreign language can use English in certain communication events. What kind of learning activities can a teacher provide to make it happen? Activities similar to communicative events are to take into account. The writer sees the importance of conducting learning activities that are communicative and integrate language skills, the ones that provide the students different learning sessions to get knowledge and skills to interact with other language users, for example in the form of a class performance. In a class performance, the learners do not learn the language out of contexts but they use the language in meaningful and purposeful activities. Literally, performance means the act, process or art of performing (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/performance?showCookiePolicy=true>). A class performance is, therefore, the art performance done by the children learning

English in a class, guided by the teacher, to be presented in front of the public, i.e. their parents and or other school personnel or invited guests.

Throughout this article, a discussion on the advantages of performance, the performance in teaching English to young learners and its association with authentic assessment will be elaborated.

2. Benefits of Performance

A class performance has a variety of advantages. For young learners, the performance enables them to use their knowledge and they can apply their language skills in certain contexts. They use both receptive and productive language skills. Before the performance, the children-guided by the teacher- practice and do rehearsal using the script prepared by the teacher. They develop both oral and literacy skills, accordingly. They collaboratively learn together with their classmates to use the language and to do the performance. The children show their language performance to the audience. It is performed on - stage, therefore, they also develop some of their multiple intelligences suggested by Gardner (in Puchta and Rivolucru, 2005).

The intelligences that may be developed are linguistic intelligence, spacial intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. At this event, in addition to proving the learning achievement, the children manage themselves to perform their language skills on stage completed with all the decorations and interaction with peers, the teacher and the audience. Such a performance can develop the children's self-confidence in using the language.

Enhancing self-confidence is one of the affective factors to be stimulated and to keep sustained. The belief of being fully capable of accomplishing a task is at least partially a factor of learning success (Brown, 2001: 62).

Through the class performance, not only the children but also three different parties in relation to teaching English to young learners can also take benefits. Stakeholders in the society represented by parents, teacher and school can share the positive aspects of conducting a class performance. Watching the children's performance can keep parents up-to-date (Cameron and McKay, 2010: 43). Parents get direct information and evidence about their children language learning achievement. They can also take part in the program evaluation to improve the quality of the following teaching and learning process. The teacher at the same time lets the social members see and criticize the evidence of his/her responsibility in accompanying children learning English and provides public accountability for his/her teaching. For the school, such an event can be something to promote the institution.

3. The Practice of Class Performance in TEYL

Class performance enables scaffolding to happen through the formats and routines as suggested by Bruner (in Cameron, 2001: 9). The teacher sets and manages the whole task and shares the parts of it to the young learners to perform. Simple chunks of language can be distributed to the class members. It is important that all children in the class are involved to take their participation during the performance. This provides learning opportunity for the young learners to learn comprehensively the language tasks and participate collaboratively in

accomplishing the task. The points that they learn do not only deal with English per se but also relate to group work or whole class activities in achieving the objectives.

Related to a performance in a class for children, Slattery and Willis (2001: 117) suggests that the teacher could help the children write out what to say. To guide young learners in doing the performance, it is needed to prepare a script toward the class performance. According to Slattery and Willis (2001: 117), the teacher could also ask the children to prepare invitations for their families, to make masks or puppets for their parts and to hold rehearsals.

This is in line with Shin's helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners, the teacher can encourage the students to supplement the activities with visuals, realia, and movement and to involve students in making visuals and realia (Shin, 2006: 3).

Parents, teachers, and the school collaborate to succeed the class performance. They can participate as the audience and or sponsors, take their roles in recording and documenting the program, contribute tangible appreciations or rewards after the class performance.

The teacher and the students can use their creativity and imagination to set various activities for the class performance. It can be providing each student with a short time for presentation using or recycling all or most of the materials taught, to show his/her skills at the end-of-year performance. Children can take different roles for the success of the class performance. One or two students can be the MC greeting and guiding the audience from the beginning up to the end of the performance program. Other students are set to give a short speech, to sing and dance, to practice a simple dialogue, etc. Another alternative to do is using a story to perform. The children are divided into groups and each group is given a separate scene from the story to work on (Wright, 1995: 56; Mixon and Temu, 2006: 17). A modification of a story can be a chain story.

Further, performing drama can also be an option to choose. In addition to building children's confidence, drama helps them build skills in group dynamics and drama is appropriate for children's different learning styles (Zalta, 2006: 25; Cameron and McKay, 2010: 91). To play a drama, the children can explore their ability in reading, speaking, listening, reciting, acting, and interacting with their mates and teacher. Through drama, they can also widen their knowledge and information related to the subject matter of the drama.

4. Performance and Authentic Assessment

Indeed, children can use the language they learned in meaningful/purposeful situations in a performance, which is real-life like. The way the children use the language tends to be more guided at least between real-world and pedagogic activities. The children are guided by the teacher in structured activities through the script provided. During the performance the teacher can observe, and together with the audience the teacher can watch what activities the young learners were doing in relation to language learning. The teacher can observe and monitor the learning achievement of the students. To help the teacher observe, a rubric can be prepared to help see the achievement the learners obtain. The statements, the speech, and the dialogues in the performance are not their spontaneous utterances to respond. However, the performance guides the students to approach contextualized communicative tasks and interactive performance, two things that are closely related to authentic or alternative assessment (Brown, 2004: 11).

Assessment is a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 35). Different from traditional assessments or formal assessments, authentic assessments are "to gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing "real-life" tasks in a particular domain (Garcia and Pearson (1994) in Leung, 2005:870). Terms such as alternative assessments, informal assessments and performance-based assessments are often used interchangeably with authentic assessments. With an authentic assessment, a teacher does efforts to measure or assess students' language performance in "real-life" tasks and situations, the tasks and situations that highly possibly happen in the learners' life.

Authentic assessment is beneficial. Puppin (2007: 15) states some of the benefits of such an assessment: the assessment procedures are clearer because of the clear demands and scoring criteria; the mismatch between testing and teaching is greatly reduced; there are fewer grammar oriented activities; the assessment instruments strongly correspond with the lesson and how it is being taught; the testing changes allow the teachers to document student progress systematically through formative and summative assessment.

To lead young learners to the authentic assessment, after the performance the teacher may set other learning activities/tasks that can encourage the learners to respond more 'naturally.' Different topics may be developed so that the learners can reuse or recycle the language points (vocabulary, language functions or language structures) they used during the performance. The topics may be related to people, objects, emotions or the event they just experienced. Shin (2007: 3) suggests dynamic units which incorporate real life situations, integrate four language skills, encourage learner autonomy or learner choice, use experiential learning and apply project-based learning. A multicultural class or multicultural society can inspire more dynamic units for the teacher to deal with young learners in their English class. With higher confidence after the performance, it is expected that those young learners can be more motivated and perform better language skills.

If it is possible, the teacher may ask the young learners to do self or peer- assessment. Child-friendly questionnaires, observation checklists, and or rubrics may be designed and utilized to help them assess their language performance. Diptoadi et.al. (2009: 107) suggest observation checklists, criteria sheet and holistic and analytical rating scales to use. By implementing authentic assessments, both young learners and the teacher have their opportunity to appreciate what other persons have been doing in language learning.

5. Closing Remark

Through a class performance, young learners can demonstrate their language skills and experience how the lessons learned are implemented in contexts. At the same time, the teacher can help the students to take preliminary steps helping the students before they perform their real language skills which are meaningful for authentic assessments.

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Appendix

Here is the example of the script to help young learners prepare their performance.

MC 1 Ana	Assalaamu'alaikum w.w. Ladies and gentlemen, and fellow students. This afternoon, we are going to have our class performance. Here are the performers.	
All students	Hello, everybody, good afternoon.	
MC 1	Thank you friends. The first program is a speech by Wihdan. Wihdan, please the floor is yours.	
Wihdan	Assalaamu'alaikum w.w. Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining this class performance. I am Wihdan, I am 7 years old. My friends and I learn English together every Wednesday. We are happy. Thank you. Assalaamu'alaikum w.w.	
MC 2 Nina	Now, we'll see the first performance. Let's welcome Nabila and Nisa. They are going to sing "I am a student."	
Nabila and Nisa (singing)	I am a student. You are a teacher. He is a doctor. She is a nurse.	I am a student. You are a teacher. He is a driver. She is a nurse.
MC2	Two students will sing about objects in the classroom. Please Yoga and Farah	
Yoga and Farah	Yoga : Let see what is in my bag. Farah : What is in your bag? Yoga : In my bag I have,, Yoga : What is in your bag, Farah?	
Farah	Look, look, look It is a book. Look, where is it? It is in the bag.	Look, look, look It is a pen. Look where is it? It is in the box.
MC 2	A group of students will sing and tell us about their dolls. Please welcome Ais and Feila.	

Ais, and Feila	Mini is wearing a red dress, red dress, red dress. Mini is wearing a red dress all day long. Mini is wearing a pink scarf, pink scarf, pink scarf. Mini is wearing a pink scarf all day long. Mini is wearing pink shoes, pink shoes, pink shoes. Mini is wearing pink shoes, all day long.
MC 1 and MC 2	The next performance will be done by three boys. They are Garda, Wijdan and Hoshmand. They will sing and act. It's time to see their performance.
Hoshmand, Garda and Wijdan	Up and down Up and down Shake, shake, shake Shake to the right, shake to the left Turn around Shake, shake, shake
MC 1	Nice performance. To end this program, please everybody stand up and do together the boys' presentation. Up and down Up and down Shake, shake, shake Shake to the right, shake to the left Turn around Shake, shake, shake
MC 1 and MC 2	Ladies and gentlemen, that's the end of our presentation. Thanks for joining this program. Until the next performance. Bye, bye. Assalaamu'alaikum w.w.

Nur Fatimah is a faculty member of English Education Department at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta. Teaching English to young learners is her interest. A book entitled *Fun Games in ELT* (2007), papers and some programs on TEYL are part of her contribution to the field. In addition, her ELT research ranges from English education (methodology) to course design, and professional development.