

INTRODUCING PLAY-ACTING AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

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To teach successfully at the primary level, it is important that children really enjoy their English class. It is an accepted fact that young children learn best what they like most; and most children really enjoy play-acting. Knowing how to introduce controlled play-acting into the primary class is a useful skill for the teacher of English as a foreign language. What follows are some hints on one way in which this has been done successfully with six and seven year olds; although these techniques work equally well with older children.

It is important for the children to know exactly what is expected of them. This type of play-acting is a teaching technique in the same way that choral repetition, individual repetition, frame dialogues and guided compositions are teaching techniques. Just as students have to be trained to use these techniques, they must be trained to work with play-acting.

STEP ONE.

The teacher should present the first short "play" on the black-board. First draw pictures of the characters in the play with speech balloons coming from their mouths.



Present the characters, Mummy and the girl in this case. The teacher should elicit the conversation from the children:

Teacher: Mummy, do..... candies?

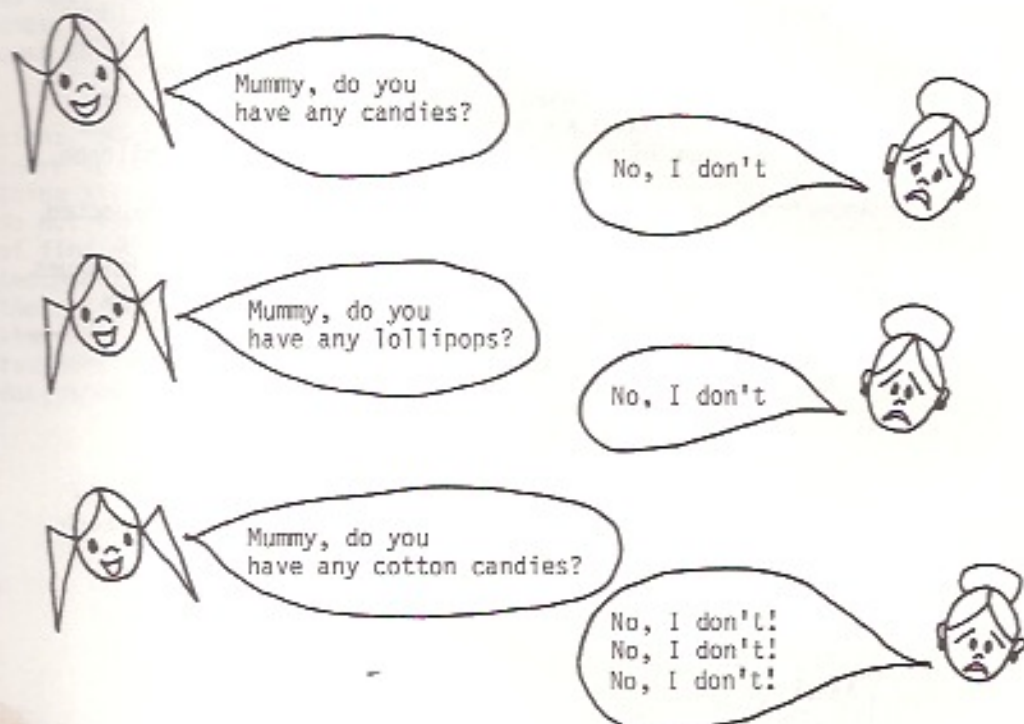
Children: Mummy, do you have any candies?

Teacher: (shakes his/her hand).

Children: No, I don't, etc.

STEP TWO.

When the teacher has elicited the entire "play" from the children, and this has been repeated by various children, in pairs, the teacher, with the help of the children, should write the entire dialogue in the balloons on the blackboard. This is very useful as the children: a) see the written form, and at this age they are still learning to read in their mother-tongue, and b) those children who are still not quite sure of the "play" receive visual clarification. The blackboard should now look something like this:



It is important for young children that the "plays" should be very repetitive. This is both to reinforce the structures they have been learning and as an aid to memory. At this stage the play should be read from the blackboard. The class should be divided into two groups. One group should read the little girl's lines and one group should read the mother's. The teacher should run her finger under the written words so that the children, who are reading chorally, keep together. After the "play" has been read through once, it should be read through again, this time with the groups changing roles.

STEP THREE.

Now it is time for the play-acting to begin. Clean the blackboard and have two children come to the front. Ask them to act out the scene. It is vital that the teacher encourage the children to throw their hearts and souls into the acting. That way it is more fun for everyone. The little girl must whine. The mother must be very angry and stamp her foot and lose her head at the end. That can't be explained to a six-year-old. The teacher has to demonstrate it to the child, and have the child copy the teacher. After two or three pairs have acted out this model "play", the students are ready to move on to the next step.

STEP FOUR.

All that the young actors now need is a few picture cues on the blackboard in order to create their own plays. Perhaps Teddy Bear and Mrs. Doll might be presented in the following way:



Two more children can be brought to the front and cast as Teddy Bear and Mrs. Doll. Providing the ground-work has been adequately done they will have no trouble in producing the following "play":

Teddy: Mrs. Doll, do you have any chocolate?

Mrs. Doll: No, I don't.

Teddy: Mrs. Doll, do you have any cake?

Mrs. Doll: No, I don't.

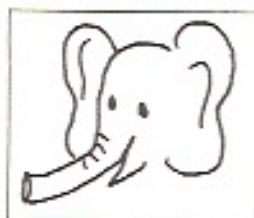
Teddy: Mrs. Doll, do you have any money?

Mrs. Doll: No, I don't! No, I don't! No, I don't!

STEP FIVE.

The children should now be divided into pairs or small groups where they will plan their own productions. On the teacher's table there should be a large selection of cut-outs. These could be pictures of well-known children's characters or imaginary characters. Each group should select two characters who will be the personalities in the group's "play". Also on the teacher's table should be a selection of cards with pictures of sweets, toys, fruit, etc. Each group will select three of these cards. Now they have a complete basis for their "play" which they will rehearse quickly and then act out for the rest of the class.

For example, a group's cut-outs and cards might look like this:



The final play would sound like this:

Jumbo: Donald, do you have any apples?

Donald: No, I don't!



Jumbo: Donald, do you have any bananas?

Donald: No, I don't!



Jumbo: Donald, do you have any jello?

Donald: No, I don't! No, I don't, No, I don't!



Of course the more involved the children get with play-acting the more complex the plays can be. The important thing is that they will enjoy this type of class, and when children are happy they learn and learn easily!