USING REALIA IN TEACHING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The use of realia is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment. It provides the learners a meaningful learning experience as it connects the classroom activities to the real world. This paper aims to look at the concepts of realia and its relevance in 21st Century learning. The paper looks at the uses and some of the challenges that can be envisaged in the handling of realia as an instructional tool. The paper also provides some light on how to select for realia for the effective instructional process. It is concluded that a teacher who is looking for a way to spice up his/her classes, or trying to find fun activities for young learners, using realia is a great tool to help your students learn. It is suggested that teachers should feel more encouraged to use realia in the classroom.

Keywords: Realia; Young learners, Instructional process, 21st Century learning.

INTRODUCTION

In education, realia are objects from real life used in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations. A teacher of a foreign language often employs realia to strengthen students' associations between words for common objects and the objects themselves. In many cases, these objects are part of an instructional kit that includes a manual and is thus considered as being part of a documentary whole by librarians.

Realia are also used to connect learners with the key focal point of a lesson by allowing tactile and multidimensional connection between learned material and the object of the lesson. They are best represented by simple objects lending themselves to classroom settings and ease of control with minimum risk of accident throughout the student-object interaction.

METHODOLOGY

Technology has begun to impact the use of realia by adding the virtual realia option, whereby three-dimensional models can

be displayed through projection or on computer screens, allowing the learner to see detail otherwise difficult to acquire and to manipulate the object within the medium on which it is displayed. The option of zooming and looking within objects makes virtual realia an important learning tool in technical environments where it may be difficult or impractical to examine an object in as much detail manually, such as the workings of living organs or machinery containing hazardous parts, such as combustion engines.

Realia reinforces language skills and appeals to both visual and kinesthetic learners of all ages. Most teachers use realia to demonstrate the meaning of vocabulary words. Think of the difference between teaching students the words for fruit versus showing them the real thing and having them guess the name. The main advantage of using real objects in the classroom is to make the learning experience more memorable for the learner. To give a couple of simple examples, if you are going to teach vocabulary of fruit and vegetables it can be much more affective for students if they can touch, smell and see the objects at the same time as hearing the new word. This would appeal to a wider range of learner styles than a simple flashcard picture of the fruit or vegetable.

A second example would be if you are going to teach some functional language for asking for the timetable for a train. You could use a fictitious timetable or you could use a real one from the local train station or the internet. This way you expose students to more language than simply the times and destinations. They will see information about prices, discounts, bank holidays, etc.

How many times have you been forced to memorize a list of odd vocabulary in a language class? You might have thought that reviewing words like "snorkel" and "asbestos" was an absolute waste of time. However, the vocabulary learned from realia emphasizes essential words that the student would encounter in the country of the target language. The use of realia with your students will not only be fun, but it will also provide a practical and interactive approach to learning English. You students will immediately find relevance in the lesson by navigating through the vocabulary on things like bus timetables, signs from airports, listings online, and receipts. Additionally, students are more likely to remember the vocabulary presented in realia as they recall the real contexts where they learned it, and your kinesthetic learners will benefit from the tangible examples you provided for them.

DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that your students will be curious and eager to explore the authentic materials you bring to class. Below

we have a few ideas of how to integrate realia into your classroom:

Put your students into groups of two and give each group material and a set of accompanying comprehension questions. Set the timer for 7 minutes, and when the time is up, discuss what the material is and review the answers to the questions. When the discussion is over, distribute the next material and repeat the cycle. Continue until you've facilitated conversations (in the target language!) for at least four different materials.

A fun way to let your artistic students shine is by recreating the realia you have presented to them. Spend at least 10-15 minutes distributing realia and discussing each piece. As you review each piece, be sure to write useful vocabulary on the board for the students to reference later on in the class. Next, pass out materials such as paper, scissors, markers, colored pencils, etc. for your students to use to make their recreations of the realia. Check each student's work to make sure they are using proper vocabulary. BONUS ROUND: Foster a bit of a competitive environment by rewarding the student with the best and most accurate recreation with a tasty treat or a "get out of homework" pass.

As you can see, it doesn't take much to prepare a lesson using realia and it will go a long way. Students will feel accomplished when they successfully recall useful vocabulary and you will feel proud when your student comes back from vacation bragging about how they fearlessly conquered the tube in London thanks to your practical lessons!

Realia are real objects such as real specimens of plants or animals and real machines or tools as they are known to exist or used in life situations. They can be useful in presenting a fascinating learning experience while improving the retention of concepts learned. The use of realia is commonplace in the classroom and is widely considered to have great value in fostering an active teaching-learning environment. *Realia* can be useful in all subject areas of the curriculum; and is appropriate for any age level of students, from beginner to advance.

In language teaching, for example, realia provides language learners with multi-sensory impressions of the language through seeing, hearing, touching, and manipulating items. Interaction with authentic materials, aids in the teaching-learning instruction by bringing students into contact with language as it is used in real-life situations in order to meet actual communication needs. Moreover, the use of realia can enhance linguistic and cultural understanding and appreciation, which are both prerequisites for real language learning.

The increasing integration of computers into the classroom and the phenomenal growth of the Internet has brought about the need to combine the new educational technologies with teaching practices and techniques. Virtual realia are digitized objects and items which are now brought into the classroom as examples or aids. They are often used to stimulate interest in the learning experience. While traditional realia is a real object in nature, when transferred to a more interactive and flexible medium, virtual realia merges an established technique with the new educational technologies in bringing culturally-based authentic materials into the classrooms.

Realia, whether traditional or virtual, have been found to be useful to improve the retention of concepts learned in the classroom. Real specimens such as plants, machines or tools enrich learning and make it more concrete, authentic and interesting as the learner is made to handle and study these things directly. The presentation of real objects in the classroom, as they are known to exist or used in life situations provides first-hand or direct experiences for learners. Do not be discouraged from using realia to learn vocabulary or grammar. Realia is suited to role-plays and immediately bring realism into the role-play. It is surprising how much difference realia makes. Your students are much more likely to feel at home.

CONCLUSION

To achieve national policy goal of equal education for all and breach the difficulties faced by students (young learners) in learning some concepts, a lot of researches have shown evidence that Realia had been found effective. As a teacher, if you are looking for a way to spice up your classes, or trying to find fun activities for young learners, using realia is a great tool to help your students learn. Considering its potentials for motivating students' learning, teachers should feel more encouraged to use realia in the classroom. Selection of the materials (realia) should be well thought and relevant to the functional needs of the learners Bringing to the classroom any real object that can serve as distraction to students should be strongly avoided.

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