
Rationale

The context of this unit plan is largely based on a storybook entitled ‘If You Take a Mouse to the Movies’ written by an award-winning American author, Laura Numeroff. It furnishes P3 pupils with a contextualized and enjoyable learning experience. Task-based approach is adopted during the process of designing the unit plan, and pupils are offered ample opportunities to draw on their pre-existing knowledge and skills to complete meaningful tasks (CDC, 2004). There are three lessons in the unit plan; the teacher would tell the story and interact with students in the first lesson, while the next two lessons strategically work on the aspect of sentence stress/ rhythm.

The unit starts with a storytelling session, which intends to develop the oracy skills of students since storytelling can both promote expressive and receptive language development (Peck, 1989). The teacher would wear a Christmas hat entering the classroom to effectively evoke a mood of Christmas and make students aware that it is time for storytelling (British Council, 2010). Considering that puppets are the substantial resources for teaching young learners (Crepeau & Richards, 2003), the teacher would bring a mouse puppet representing the main character of the story to carry out spontaneous interactions with students. Pupils at Key Stage 1 are encouraged to “make predictions... using pictorial clues and book cover” (CDC, 2004) while listening to a story, and thus the teacher would ask plenty of both display and referential questions to train their higher-level thinking skills, for example, the teacher would ask students to tell what they can see on the book cover and ask them what the mouse would do after buying popcorn. The post-task of this lesson echoes with the Directed Listening and Think Activity introduced by Stauffer (1980). Students would recall their memories of the plots of the story and exploit their creativity by drawing what they want to hang on a Christmas tree. This aims to elicit verbal responses from pupils to ensure that they can comprehend the story.

Advancing the understanding of sentence stress/ rhythm requires learners’ ability to identify the difference between content words and function words, to utter schwa /ə/ correctly, and to perform linking in a sentence. According to the data generated from the corpus (https://corpus.eduhk.hk/english_pronunciation/index.php/our-spoken-english/) developed by Chen & Chan (2018), among the recordings of 20 Hong Kong and 96 mainland

college students, 99% of them have the problem of the absence of consonant-vowel linking, which clearly shows that students should be taught about linking so that their pronunciation could be improved; 90 out of 116 speakers from Hong Kong and mainland in the corpus (over 75%) also have problems related to pronouncing schwa, including the insertion and omission of schwa and changing the schwa sound into other vowels such as /e/, /ɒ/ and /əʊ/. Hu (2017) points out that Chinese EFL learners commonly pronounce words in a sentence with the same force, which makes their speeches fail to maintain rhythm, while it is also extremely common to find that speakers in the corpus utter function words (e.g. the auxiliary do) in the same speed and stress as uttering content words (e.g. people).

The two lessons following the storytelling session are designed to work on improving students' mastery of sentence stress/ rhythm. The second lesson intends to make students understand and practice the correct pronunciation of schwa and linking, while the third lesson focuses on the differentiation between content words and function words and at last students would bring these three aspects together to produce a sentence with the correct sentence stress.

The slides for the storybook are not uploaded due to the problem of copyright, but you may buy the book online on <http://www.bookdepository.com/> or you may find the following online video helpful <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ2DGNiiUjY>; while you may download the accompanying PowerPoint slides specifically designed for teaching lessons 2 and 3.

References:

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