

WHEN SIMPLE IS BEAUTIFUL: THE HOOK BOOK LOOK TOOK LESSON STRUCTURE

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Abstract

The purpose of our talk is to introduce a four-step lesson structure which is simple but flexible enough to be used for teaching English to Young Learners (EYL). Young learners (age 5-12) tend to have short attention spans, so it is important for teachers to break the boredom. Given this situation, we offer an alternative lesson plan framework, namely The Hook Book Look Took (HBLT) which was originally developed by Richards and Bredfeldt (1998), and subsequently adapted by Renandya & Tedjaatmadja (2012). This four-step lesson structure begins with the Hook, which serves as an initial attention-getter, followed by the Book, which forms the main phase of the lesson and takes the form of teacher read-alouds. In the next phase, the Look, children are invited to notice relevant language features from the stories read aloud by the teacher, and the last phase, the Took, provides key takeaways of the lesson.

In this presentation, we describe the four steps in detail and discuss a number of principles that underpin this lesson structure. We draw principles from general learning theories (e.g., multi-sensory learning, active learning through play, social learning principle) and from second language learning theories (e.g., meaning focused learning via comprehensible input, form-focused learning via noticing pertinent language features), which we believe are particularly relevant for teaching language to young learners. We then provide a sample lesson to illustrate how this lesson structure is put into practice and describe what we have learned from trying out this lesson with a class of young children. Throughout the presentation, we invite participants to share their experiences of developing lessons and teaching young children with us, thus enriching each others' experience.

This presentation is particularly relevant for teachers of young children who are keen to explore newer approaches to engaging the young minds.

Keywords: English for Young Learners (EYL), Lesson structure

1. Introduction

Young learners (age 5-12), by nature, tend to have short attention spans (5-10 minutes) so it is important for teachers to present teaching points in small and manageable units. In addition, they are very much interested in anything physical, musical, and tangible. They learn their world through a multi sensory approach; therefore, a wide range of teaching activities and material is of high importance. Let's take a look at young children's language learning characteristics:

They enjoy playing games

Games make language learning enjoyable. Through games and other play-like activities children can pick up a lot of language, including words and their collocations, fixed expressions and other grammatical points. They are naturally drawn to music, colors, picture,

and physical activities. If we involve them in activities that involve singing, dancing, role-playing and, story-telling, they are more likely to stay engaged and focused in the lesson.

They prefer unstructured, incidental learning

Where language learning is concerned, this preference can in fact enhance their language learning experience. This can happen when we provide wide and meaningful exposure to language where words and phrases occur quite naturally and where the children's attention is focused on understanding the messages conveyed through enjoyable and meaningful language.

Given this situation, we offer an alternative lesson plan framework, called The Hook Book Look Took (HBLT) lesson structure which was originally developed by Richards and Bredfeldt (1998). It is a four-step strategy that is particularly popular with Sunday school teachers. This structure begins with the Hook, which serves as an initial attention-grabber, followed by the main material of English exposure usually via stories (The Book). Later on, children are invited and encouraged to notice a particular language feature (The Look), and to have a memorable learning take away (The Took). A more detailed explanation about HBLT is provided in the following section.

2. The Hook Book Look Took Lesson Structure

HBLT can be interpreted in various ways; so the one we provide here is one of the many possible versions. There are four steps in the HBLT lesson structure and their language learning principles reflecting each of these steps are elaborated as follows.

Hook

As the name suggests, the Hook refers to any activity that teachers can use to grab children's full attention. The Hook should be fun and enjoyable. It should be brief too and should not last more than 5 minutes. The Hook can include, but not limited to, singing, doing pantomimes, playing games, dancing, drawing, or other activities that involve bodily movements. It is expected that when children are in a happy state of mind, they are more ready to learn. To make it more effective, The Hook should be related to the main objective of the lesson and prepare them before moving on to the main part of the lesson, the Book.

Book

As the main part of the lesson, 'The Book' can take the form of any textual materials that appeal to young learners. For young learners we suggest that The Book take the form of short stories or drama as they share a number of features that make it natural to integrate during lessons. Both of them help children to build their imagination and creativity as well as learn about life and values. As much as possible, they should involve many senses and appeal to children with varied learning styles. The key considerations in story selection are that they should be interesting, relevant, enjoyable, and comprehensible.

Another significant point is for the teachers to do some form of reading aloud; either reading to or with the children. The latter, reading with the children, is preferred because research has shown that it keeps the learners mentally engaged, which tends to result in deeper and durable learning (Blok, 1999). A lot of research has also demonstrated that reading aloud can help

learners increase their vocabulary, improve their reading skills, expose themselves to the correct grammar and pronunciation in such an enjoyable way (Fisher et al, 2004, Santoro et al, 2008).

This reading fluency, in turn, will result on automaticity which is a key point in language acquisition (Grabe, 2010). In addition, the Book exemplifies Nation's (1996) first learning strand, i.e., learning through meaning focused input, where the learners' attention is primarily on the contents (meaning) of the stories, not on the form, which language researchers believe promote incidental learning (e.g., Renandya, 2007).

Another potential benefit from teacher read-alouds is that it can improve children's listening skills.

In addition, teachers can include some games so that children can work with their kinesthetic style. This way, children will, hopefully, learn best when information is presented using a combination of all three modes (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic).

Look

The next step is to get the students to look more closely at the language features of the story presented. After being exposed to some language input at the Book step, students should be made aware of which particular features of the language to be noticed. This phase reflects Nation's (1996) second strand, language focused learning, which states that deliberate attention to language features enhances learning. These can be vocabulary, pronunciation of words used in the story, certain grammatical structures, etc. It is very important not to overdo this phase of the lesson. The key here is to select one or two language features that are most important and relevant in the context of the lesson, and not to engage our young learners with meaningless grammatical exercises, which often characterize traditional methods of teaching young learners.

Took

As the take-away activities, the Took should be something easy and enjoyable to remember after the lesson. This way, it is expected that students will be able to transfer the language items they've learnt to a new context. A simple song or nursery rhyme that contains one or two language features covered in the lesson can be selected as a fun way to end the HBLT lesson.

3. The HBLT Implementation

In order to illustrate how HBLT can be put into practice, we designed the following lesson plans to use in three learning contexts:

Context 1: It was conducted in a national-plus primary school in Surabaya. There are fourteen primary 2 students. English is the medium of instruction.

Context 2: It was conducted in an English course (Children class) and there were six students, ranging from Primary 2 to Primary 6. Bahasa Indonesia and English are the medium of instruction.

Context 3: It was conducted in an English course (Children class) and there were nine students, ranging from Primary 2 to Primary 6. Bahasa Indonesia and English are the medium of instruction.

Lesson Plan

Time : +/- 60 minutes

Teaching Aids : - laptop, LCD, and speakers
- colorful flags
- paper, pencils, and colored pencils (optional)

Objectives :

By the end of this meeting, the students will be able to:

- talk about the objects and colors around them using the right form (adjective + Noun)
- pronounce the sound of /th/ as in /there/, /the/, /this/ and of /əʊ/ as in /rainbow/, /go/, /yellow/

1) The Hook (10’):

Greet the class with a good-morning or good-afternoon (depending on the time of the day). Have the class stand up and respond to your greeting. Ask the students about their favorite colors and eventually, ask the children to learn a new song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTDJiPd3L0>

<p>The lyrics</p> <p>Red and yellow and pink and green Orange and purple and blue I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow too.</p> <p>Red and yellow and pink and green Orange and purple and blue I can sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, sing a rainbow, to you</p>
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In the 3rd or 4th attempt, ask the students to hold up the right color flag when a particular color is sung.

2) The Book (20’)

Tell the students they are about to watch a colorful video called “Our Colorful World”. Teacher may list a couple of new vocabulary with meaning/definition to help students comprehend the story. Play the video 2-3 times. In the 3rd viewing, ask the students to hold up the right color flag when a particular color is mentioned. In the 4th viewing, turn off the volume and ask the students to read aloud to improve their vocabulary, practice using grammatical rules (Adjective + Noun word order), and work on their pronunciation.

The Book: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxfaVWsHQEM>

The Script

This is Billy and Splodge. Billy and Splodge are in a spaceship. They are looking for animals in space.

Splodge sees a planet. Everything on this planet is red. Look at this forest. The trees are red, and the leaves are red. But there aren't any animals here.

Splodge sees another planet. Everything on this planet is yellow. Look at the yellow sky, and the yellow clouds. There is a yellow volcano too. Look at the yellow smoke! There aren't any animals here.

Now Splodge sees another planet. Everything on this planet is pink. Look at the pink sea. There are pink shells and pink plants in the sea. There aren't any animals here.

Splodge sees another planet. Everything on this planet is blue. This planet is very hot. There is a big blue sea, and a desert with blue sand. And Look! There are blue plants. There aren't any animals here.

Splodge sees one more planet. Everything on this planet is green. This planet is very cold. The clouds are green, and the snow is green. There aren't any animals.

Billy is in the spaceship. Splodge, there are animals in space. Let's go home!

Splodge sees another planet. It's planet Earth. The sky is blue, and the sun is yellow. The grass is green, and the flowers are red and pink. What colours can you see?

3) The Look (15')

The teacher will focus on the rules of 'Adjective + Noun' word order (while integrating the vocabulary of the color and the world around them). Ask them to pay attention to the following structure:

There is a yellow volcano.

There are pink shells and pink plants in the sea.

There is a big blue sea, and a desert with blue sand.

There are blue plants.

4) The Took (15')

There could be a wide variety of the Took; for instance:

a) Allow the students to be creative by drawing their "own planet" on a piece of paper and later on, ask them to write sentences to describe their pictures (e.g. "There is a yellow sea" or "The grass is blue"). This way, the vocabulary will be reinforced.

b) Allow the students to be creative by writing a short paragraph of their "own planet", mostly consisting of 'Adjective + Noun' word order. This way, the vocabulary will be reinforced. If there is any remaining time, ask the students to sing "Rainbow Song" again along with you.

c) Allow the students to make three sentences (with Adjective + Noun word Order) using the objects around them.

Context 1

The students had already learnt about nouns in the previous meeting. They were excited when the song was introduced and they loved it. They also enthusiastically sang the song together and some of them even came up with creative ideas like arranging the flags (in the right order) on their table to help them raise the right color faster. The flags definitely got them occupied. Even when the teacher asked if anybody would like to sing the song in front of the class, most of them volunteered to do so. We (the regular teacher and Herwindy, the first author) heard them humming the song a couple of times even after the song was over - an indicator that the Hook works. The children also paid attention to the video when it was played. They raised the flags and during the read-aloud (reading with the children) they also participated with high enthusiasm. The song and the video were repeated a couple of times. The teacher asked the children about the definition of Nouns and Adjectives (as explained in the previous meeting). Then, she asked them to mention some Nouns and Adjectives from the video they watched as well as make sentences from the . The students enthusiastically answered; however, there was no enough time for the Took session so the teacher could only manage to ask the students to identify the right word order. During the informal conversation, the teacher mentioned that she was very pleased to have this HBLT lesson structure because it gave the class a pleasant wake-up call amidst their hectic schedule.

Context 2

The teacher was not present in the classroom so I (Herwindy, the first author) had to introduce myself and greeted the students. There were some awkward moments in the first few minutes although this lessened as I began asking questions about their favorite colors. When the song was first introduced, there was no response from the students. One of the possible reasons was the group rapport had not been established yet – the children just knew each other for several meetings (as mentioned by the part-timer staff). They began to show more interest and enthusiasm when I asked them to help me distribute the flags. The students somehow were more focused on raising the right flags than singing the song. The students were also quite passive during the Book although they seemed to enjoy the video. When I explained the Adj + Noun structure, they could answer my answer so I thought they got it. However, they still needed guidance when doing the task, especially about grammar and vocabulary (e.g. I have an orange bag instead of a orange bag). Most of the times, I used bahasa Indonesia in the classroom.

Context 3

The teacher was not present in the classroom so I (Herwindy, the first author) had to introduce myself and greeted the students. However, there was no awkward moment. They spoke bahasa Indonesia most of the time. They were very excited when I introduced the song. I heard them humming the song a couple of times even after the song was over - an indicator that the Hook works. Learning from my previous experience, I repeated the song and the video a couple of times for more comprehension and English exposure. The students also learnt the correct pronunciation as the song and video were played. The students seemed to be engrossed in the video, possibly because of the colorful animations. It is true that sometimes the students already know the rules of the language but they need to be repeated in The Look to reinforce the lesson. In the Took, I asked them to come up with three sentences with Adj (color) + Noun structure using any object around them. One of the students asked question about typical sentence so the writer gave example “I have a black bag.” I also moved around

to see if any problems emerged. The students seemed to be enthusiastic and cooperative as some of them approached the writer to recheck or asked questions when in doubt. One student seemed to be timid so the writer had to accompany her to come forward when she read aloud her sentences. Again, bahasa Indonesia most of the time was used to build rapport with students. After the class was over, I asked the part time staff who helped me with the video recording (since the regular teacher was not present) and she mentioned the students enjoyed the class.

4. Discussion

We are aware that the presence of a new teacher (Herwindy) in the classroom (context 1-3) and the absence of the regular teacher (context 2 and 3) may affect the classroom atmosphere. Nevertheless, after these three HBLT try-outs, we have identified the following learning points:

The power of creativity

The Hook requires creativity as it is not easy to attract children's attention. The colorful flags in the HBLT project, for example, served this purpose as it immediately grabbed their attention and helped paving the way for learning to take place.

The power of read-alouds

On the basis of our HBLT small projects, we are more convinced that reading aloud is a powerful tool to provide an ideal "teacher-centered" approach for vocabulary introduction. In terms of practice, the students need a fluent oral model; which means teachers should become good story tellers – telling the story as they read it. This will involve the reading with clarity, voice modulation, and expression (Fisher et al, 2004).

The power of balance

Although the lesson structure contains a lot of fun, children should be made aware of the learning points. In the Look, they were invited to pay attention to particular language forms of the Hook and the Book, which will eventually lead to a balance of meaning and forms.

The power of meaningful repetition

Meaningful repetition is a crucial key in language learning as it provides models of target language, exemplifying Nation's (1996) learning through meaning focused input. This will promote incidental learning. We did this in our HBLT projects by playing the songs and video several times until the words were internalized in their mind. In addition, the children were asked to apply what they had learnt in their own context in the Took. This way, it would help maintaining the new lessons introduced as the students left the class.

The power of rapport

In general, children seek the teacher's attention and approval. Remembering names, for example, might look simple but if teachers manage to do so, they will know their teachers care about them and trust them even more (as experienced by the writer). This might include appreciating the little things they do, for example thanking them for helping the teacher distribute the flags or giving compliments for their effort to answer the questions. It is expected that this attitude will give positive influence on their motivation and willingness to make an effort in class (Read, 1998). In addition, the fact that children learn from the non-linguistic elements highlights the importance of gesture of thoughtfulness and body language.

The children can tell whether teachers are genuinely interested or prepared in the classroom and this is something to note for the teachers' advantages.

The power of first language

In classroom, teachers might also use L1 in particular cases, especially when carrying out classroom management, giving instruction or building rapport with students (Harmer, 2007). We are also aware of the learners' differences in terms of proficiency; thus, I used some bahasa Indonesia in the 2nd and 3rd HBLT project to enhance the children's comprehension.

The power of clear instruction

Children, especially with lower level of proficiency, might also be afraid of making mistakes so it is important to give examples of how to do the task. In project 3, for example, I assumed the children already knew what to do with the task since she had played the video as well as gave examples in the Look. It turned out that they needed to be told of particular sentence structure to use (e.g. I have a black bag). Another case was to think about dealing with more than one possible answer, e.g. there could be more than one color so tell them about how you want them to deal with it, be it mentioning one dominant color or mentioning them all.

5. Conclusion

Considering young learners' unique characteristics, the HBLT lesson structure seems to be well-suited to address the learning needs of young children; it is a simple yet flexible lesson structure to be adapted in many different ways. We have also described what we have learned from trying out this lesson with three classes of young children. The very principle of teaching young learners, however, is to have a genuine interest in children. This way, children will feel comfortable and HBLT framework will work at its best. In conclusion, we hope other EYL teachers can also share their experiences of developing lessons and teaching young children with us, thus enriching each others' experience.

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