

The Approach to English Language Teaching at the Gurukulam (Hemchandracharya Sanskrut Pathshala)



The Place of English Language Learning in the Gurukulam's System of Education

- To understand the true nature of life is the main aim of the Gurukulam Education System.
- The true nature of life can only be understood if first and foremost, we take life as our main learning resource, not books. Whatever books are referred to in the Gurukulam, whether they are shastras or text books- they are used as a tool to develop thinking and skills within students, *which are deeply rooted in a perception of real life.*
- Dharmik Studies is taught to open the dhrishti of the students to the eternal principles that govern existence, and Sanskrit is taught as it is based on the eternal principles of the science of sound, cognition and linguistics. So is the case in all other subjects and activities. They are connected to their utility value and life enhancement value in the student's real life. It is our aim that English language teaching too resonates with the same concept of being based on life principles. Our approach is oriented towards teaching English language in a way that students find it easy to listen, grasp, communicate and express themselves freely in the language.

What does this mean?

- The student's life will be taken as the first starting place to develop vocabulary and concepts.
- The text book will not be the starting place for teaching. Narration, conversation, activities and reflection will be the starting place for teaching. Narrating the concept in each lesson or story, conducting conversation practice in class with proper guidance, doing activities or exercises which help with the grounding of the concept and finally, reading and writing the course material is the base of the method. The text book will be a guide for the areas the Guruji must cover while engaging with the students.
- Through this method, the Guruji must bring the attention of the students to the world they see around them- the objects, living beings, emotions, occurrences, sensations, situations and develop the student's understanding and application of language, while engaging with life.
- All the language components- vocabulary, sentences, listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, conceptualising will be developed on the base of real experience.

How Does This Way of Teaching Operate?



1. See the Text Book as a Resource, Not a Book of a Fixed Set of Instructions

- Read the lessons with a peaceful mind before teaching them.
- Try and see: 1) What is the main learning component of the lesson. 2) What is the value or skill that the lessons shows. 3) What is the language component that the lesson guides to teach.
- Visualize the students having the ability or the thinking that the lesson seeks to share.
- After teach each lesson, do a quick check through classroom conversations to see whether the students *understood* – 1) the value communicated in the chapter 2) the language component in the lesson and how it is to be used.
- You, the Guruji, are the main source of learning for the students, not the text book. As the Guruji, you will be the main bridge between the students and the life learnings in the book. You have to be conscious of remaining that bridge and NOT gum that makes students stick to the books only.
- Migrate from a mindset of “I have to complete the syllabus” to “I want my students to be able to use this concept and its understanding perfectly in their life”.

2. Your **Presence** is the Main Source of Learning for Students, Not Your Instructions

- The main source of learning for the students is the Guruji's own conduct and demeanour while in class. Maintaining a calm and composed manner is very important.
- The classroom talking, banter, instructions and chit chatting between the students and the Guruji that happens informally at the beginning and the end of classes is also a very important source of learning. Since the conversation is taking place more naturally and outside the bounds of the class's teaching protocols, if the Guruji can be conscious and aware and use language skillfully even in casual situations, the students will benefit greatly.
- The Guruji's tone of voice leaves a lasting imprint on the mind of the students since it is through that medium that they will learn everything that they will in class. If the Gurujis are aware of this and can consciously be calm in manner and clearer in their diction, the students will follow the same manner.

3. Connecting the Lessons to Life

- The main aim of any subject taught in the Gurukulam is to develop sensitivity, thoughtfulness, values and a noble character in the students.
- After going through the lesson to be taught, the Guruji can ask themselves,
 - 1. What is the main value this lesson communicates?
 - 2. Where does this value appear in the student's life? In which area of the student's life can this value be of use?
 - 3. Through what real life examples, can I motivate the students to apply the value learnt in the lesson to their own life?
 - 4. Can I think of any game or activity which will make this concept clearer for the student?
 - 5. This lesson gives me the opportunity to develop thoughtfulness and sensitivity in the students through which spiritual or ethical concept? Through what methods, tools, exercises, examples?
 - 6. The new words and concepts in each lesson- how should they sound coming from the students? (This kind of visualisation creates more clarity for the Guruji in teaching)

4. Connecting the Lessons to Life THROUGH the Concepts of Tattva

- A famous linguist once said, “Language is for CONCEPTUALISATION, not simply for communication. Communication happens as a natural bi-product of this process.” What this means is that if each teaching component is framed on the structure of the truth shown in the shastras, the language that develops will inherently have a deeper connect with values.
- In the Bhaaratiya way of life, our root concepts are different from the Western way of looking at things. And this distinction has to be brought out. Some examples are:
 - 1. In the Western systems living beings are first introduced through their type-example: plants, animals, microorganisms, birds, humans. In the bhaaratiya dhrishti, the very first point we think on is that every other living being is like us as we all seek comfort and happiness and we all don’t like distress and unhappiness.
 - 2. The natural world is seen in Bhaarat, as a world where all types of living beings exist in interdependent life circles. The Western perspective sees the natural world as “resources” for human being’s use.

- 3. Causing least or no harm to other living beings is at the core of our ethics. Consumption, fulfilling desires and utility value to humans is at the core of Western ethics.
- 4. The Bhaaratya way of life regards NOT using destructive items more effective, than using them and then recycling or re-using them. Refraining rather than regretting. This requires clarity of thinking, simplicity and will power.
- 5. The Western model of life functions of fulfilling dreams and desires. The Bhaaratya model of life functions on right knowledge, right perception, developing of values and a strong character, based on which all parameters of life are to be decided.
- 6. The Bhaaratya way of life is based on fulfilling one's duties in all spheres of life for greater happiness. The Western way of life is based on a person's own choice as per their own thinking.
- There are many many such distinctions. The Dharmik Studies Guruji can be consulted on a number of such values. They can be asked about how to introduce particular values, through what points. They can be asked what is the nature of each value, and the consequences of having or not having it. Senior members of Mahajanam, social workers and elders can be consulted on how some culture related topics can be taught to the students.

5. The Listening Component

- This is the main important component through which the student will grasp the language. This happens through formal teaching in the class room and also through informal teaching that takes place through ordinary conversations and instructions from the Guruji.
- It is very important that students get to hear the proper pronunciation of each word. Kindly spend some time on this. Make sure each student has got it right by making them repeat the word after the Guruji a few times. Correct pronunciation impacts the student's ability to spell words correctly. With longer words, the Guruji can make sure they get all the syllables right.
- **Introducing the component of each lesson, be it a story or a general knowledge topic, through narration without book support is an important part of this teaching process. NOT reading the lesson from the book right from the beginning. So each lesson has to be shared with the students verbally, while they simply sit back and listen. Class room conversation or question-and-answer can happen in simple sentences in regard to the chapter explains. Only then, should the book be opened to read the lesson.**

6. The Speaking Component

- Teaching English as a second language requires a different method of teaching than in conventional, English medium schools. It needs to be more rooted in listening and speaking for reading and writing to happen properly.
- Getting students to speak, on the basis of a correct method, so that future errors can be avoided, is a planned process with 4 main steps:
- 1. Listening- Before expecting the student to speak even one word, make sure that he/she has heard the word in classroom instructions, conversation or activities and is familiar with the feel of how English sounds.
- 2. “One-Word-Answer” Questions- The very first step of getting a student to speak is to ask him/her simple questions that have a one word answer. These questions are also important in a way that they can connect the student’s attention to things

around them rather than to a book. Guruji can point at various objects or creatures or persons and ask “What is that?”, “Who is this?”

- 3. “Same Syntax” Questions- The second step is to ask students questions, the answer of which has a similar syntax structure. Example, “What is that?” “That is a cupboard.” “What colour is the cupboard?” “The cupboard is brown.” “What is matushree’s name?” “Matushree’s name is Sheetalben.” “How many pencils are these?” “These are 12 pencils.” Such question-answer pairs which have a similar structure help not only to build confidence in the students by giving them a chance to practice known words repeatedly in different questions, but they also help in clarifying related basic grammar concepts like, “this-that”, “these-those”, singulars and plurals, “a, an, the”, “much-many” and framing of basic questions using what, how much/many, who. Such a basic question-answer format can be practiced not only with objects and people, but also with emotions. Various emotions can be enacted, asking “What am I?” “You are angry/happy/sad/etc.”
- 4. Open ended Questions- After ample practice of the above types with as many examples as possible, the Guruji can move on to regular open ended questions like, “What are you doing this evening?”

7. The Reading Component

- Reading in this method is done in a particular way.
- The Guruji must not go straight into the reading of a new lesson or story. The narration of the lesson content, without a book open in front of everyone, is the very first step.
- Only after the content has been narrated and discussed in class, will the Guruji open the book to read.
- Before beginning reading, some instructions should be given letting the students know what to expect. The students have to be told that they may not necessarily know all the words or expressions appearing in the lesson, which is fine. They should be told to ask the meaning of any word, expression or concept they don't understand. This is done specifically to reduce their fear of attempting to speak and ask questions, and also so they know that not knowing something is nothing to be afraid of.
- The dictionary exercise is an integral part of reading through all the levels. Every student can make note of words they are unfamiliar with, and find its meaning in the English as well as the Gujarati dictionaries.

8. The Writing Component

- Like reading, the writing component has also been approached in a different way in this method.
- In conventional school, reading and writing happens together and are of the same level. At the Gurukulam, we have attempted something different. Since we are exposed to English that is spoken in the world around us, the students are already familiar with some big words, which they know the pronunciation and meaning, but it may be a bit advanced for their writing level hierarchy. A student still at the writing level of 3 and 4 letter words, may know words like- design, negative, active, compare, meeting- and many more. So we have created a split in the speaking and writing level. The oral vocabulary may look a little more advanced than the written vocabulary. We did not want to miss the opportunity to capture in the minds of the students the words that they already vaguely know and have heard. Neither, did we want to compromise on a thorough development of writing, which happens at its particular pace. So we created 2 segments of vocabulary- oral and written. Oral vocabulary being big words the students may already know, and written vocabulary being step by step progressing vocabulary that develops based on its rules of progress.

9. Extracting the Grammar Component and Teaching it in a Natural Way

- **1. Simplifying the language in the lessons:** In case the language in a lesson is a bit higher in level than the student is comfortable with, the Guruji can simplify it by breaking complex sentences down, to simple sentences. Example, “Its not often that one finds showers of rain in the summer.” This can be explained with the help of simpler sentences like, “The rains normally begin in June. It doesn’t rain in the summer in Bhaarat. In some countries it rains in the summer as well. A shower of rain is an expression. So it says that it is not often that one finds showers of rain in the summer.” The lessons in the book don’t have to be followed word for word. As long as the students understand the content, are able to converse in simple language about it and progress in their writing at their pace, it is not compulsory that they get every sentence and its form exactly.
- **2. Replace a word or phrase if a sentence is very simple:** Example, if there are a couple of sentences like, “She did not know which way to go. She looked left, then right. She walked a little towards the left and then turned back and went the other way.” The Guruji could introduce a word like, “She was confused about which way to go.” This is a good way to build complex vocabulary from simple sentences.

- **3. Draw the student's attention to all new phrases, idioms and expressions appearing in the lessons:** Encourage them to make oral sentences through various oral games, exercises or story telling.
- **4. Teach Tenses as per the Situation:** When describing what someone did in the recent or distance past, it is natural that they would say it in past tense (example, what someone did last evening, earlier in the day, over the holidays or in the past, etc.). When describing an on going process or a regular activity, it is natural that a person would use present tense (example, describing a schedule or a routine, narrating a recipe while cooking, demonstrating how something is being made, etc.). When speaking about a desire, a plan, a vision, a fear or a future event, it is natural they would use future tense (example, what I plan to do after diwali, what I will do in Auli this time, where will we be for Paryushan, etc.). After the basic teaching of the tenses that takes place between levels 3 and 5, the tenses can be practiced in more and more complexity as the language develops, following the discussions of real situations. This will make learning and practice of grammar closer to the student's life process and so, easier to learn.
- **5. Practicing conversation of real situations and thoughts in as many ways as possible:** Using as many different sentence forms, phrases, formats as possible. Practicing smaller language components and rules consistently while communicating orally or in writing.

10. Keeping in Mind the Gurukulam's Broader Vision and Mission: Following a Non Violent, Non Exploitative Way of Life

- Guruji, kindly keep in mind that the Gurukulam philosophy is one of demonstrating spiritual and dharmik principles through their implementation in daily life.
- This means that we aspire to imbibe the principle of non violence and non exploitation, or least violence and least exploitation, in our daily function to the greatest degree possible. So not just non violence in manner, behaviour and feelings, but also its follow through in the way we consumer food, the medicine that we take, the clothes that we wear, the things we use and they our living spaces are constructed.
- The Bhaaratiya culture and sanskriti is one, which is a natural design for a sustainable, least violent, compassionate and true knowledge and perception based life structure. We would like to adhere to its serene and noble shastriya norms as much as possible.
- As a Guruji, this means that while teaching, the selection of content and stories or the kind of sentences, examples and activities selected should be those which reinforce these noble principles and give the students a thought process for living such a life of holistic values even in this day and age. Selection of teaching materials or methods should have content with clarity of what is “Hay, Gnay and Upaaday” in life.

Thank you

Thank you for your efforts, cooperation and contribution. We value your participation in bringing that essence of the true Bhaarat to the current generation, which the world revered it for, once upon a time.

