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**ASSOCIATIVE SYMBOLS METHOD (MAS) IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRIMARY
SCHOOL PUPILS**

The article «Associative Symbols Method (MAS) in Teaching English to primary school pupils» reveals the essence of this method, its positive aspects and shortcomings, presents its novelty, highlights methodological problems (expanding the language capabilities of students, making the language learning process desirable and interesting, forming a positive attitude towards learning; bring the process of learning a foreign language closer to casual communication, bring the process of learning a foreign language closer to the process of learning a native language, acquaint students with the socio-cultural features of the country whose language is being studied). The authors pay a special attention to the formation of lexical competence of younger schoolchildren. The technology of input and automation of lexical units is shown in the article. The organization of classroom learning activities of junior students takes place according to the following algorithm: students (alone or together with the teacher) create associative symbols for a new lexical unit; the teacher checks the understanding of the created symbols, getting acquainted with new lexical units, automating of students' actions with new lexical units in the form of various games.

Key words: *method of associative symbols, primary school pupils, foreign languages, English language, motivation, educational component of the program, imitation, memorization.*

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МЕТОД АСОЦІАТИВНИХ СИМВОЛІВ (MAS) У ВИКЛАДАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ДЛЯ ПОЧАТКОВИХ КЛАСІВ

У статті «Метод асоціативних символів (MAS) у викладанні англійської мови для початкових класів» розкрита суть даного методу, його позитивні сторони і недоліки, представлено його новизну, висвітлено методологічні проблеми (розширювати мовні можливості учнів, робити процес вивчення мови бажаним, цікавим, формувати позитивне відношення навчання; наближати процес вивчення іноземної мови до невимушеного спілкування, зближувати процес вивчення іноземної мови до процесу вивчення рідної мови, знайомити учнів з соціокультурними особливостями країни, мова якої вивчається). Особливу увагу у статті приділено формуванню лексичної компетентності молодших школярів: показано технологію введення та автоматизації лексичних одиниць. Організація класної навчальної діяльності молодших школярів відбувається за таким алгоритмом: створення учнями (самими чи разом з учителем) асоціативного символу до нової лексичної одиниці; перевірка розуміння створеного символу, ознайомлення з новою лексичною одиницею, автоматизація дій учнів з новою лексичною одиницею у вигляді різноманітних ігор.

Ключові слова: метод асоціативних символів, учні початкових класів, іноземні мови, англійська мова, мотивація, освітній компонент програми, імітація, запам'ятовування.

Introduction. Following common European recommendations on education and solving the problem of how to optimize learning and teaching of a foreign language, Lutsk scientific school has developed a new method of foreign language teaching – method of associative symbols (MAS), which is the procedural foundation of associative teaching the foreign language to primary school children.

The purpose of the article is to describe the method of associative symbols and the effectiveness of its usage. This method highlights the language of movements, gestures, facial expressions, the language of our body, language of coded ideas and associations. This method improves the perception and reproduction of information, being built on the child's ability to imagine and fantasize. It allows to create an image of practically any lexical or grammatical unit by means of bright children's imagination. The child learns foreign word much quicker if it is associated with a particular image or action. The method incorporates associative symbols into studying a foreign language through imitation.

Over the years, creating together with children's associative images in symbols for all lexical and grammatical units studied, we have attempted to adapt this kind of body language in the process of studying the subject of English language in the kindergartens and primary school.

Using the language of movements, gestures and facial expressions we try to simulate various learning situations. For example, depicting a forest, a teacher together with children shows and overplays presented image-symbol in different situations, performing different actions with gestures: run, jump, play with the ball or with friends, gather mushrooms, berries, flowers, ride a bike; comment what we see in the forest: trees, bushes, grass, flowers, animals and so on.

The curriculum and methodological guide for working with children of the preschool age entitled «*Learn English, Playing*» (Hunko S. V., Konovaliuk Z., 2011) and the textbook for pupils of the 1st and 2nd grades «*While Playing, We Study. English for Children in Movements (by the Method of Associative Symbols)*» have been designed and published with the purpose to popularize the method. The manuals have been approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and recommended for use in educational establishments. The methodological guide and the textbook are supplemented with display materials in the form of educational-methodical film, which visually shows how to apply the method in the English classroom (Hunko, S. V., Husak, L. Ye., 2013).

The novelty of these publications is that lexical material in them is presented not traditionally, but using the method of associative symbols which releases pupils from the constant boring memorization of new words and expressions and converts complex learning process into memorizing linguistic material for pleasure. MAS peculiarity can be manifested in the fact that it helps children to learn English in an interesting, easily accessible, entertaining way. The methodology was developed

and tested using the game-playing techniques, communicative-active, socio-cultural and personality-oriented approaches to the intellectual development of primary school children. Like any other method MAS is based on certain didactic principles.

The innovative methods of foreign language associative learning are based on the principle of matching innate inclinations and lay emphasis on the use of associative symbols, creating conditions close to life situations, and make the process of learning a foreign language accessible and natural. The main purpose of foreign language teaching at primary school in terms of the method of associative symbols is to form elementary foreign language communicative competence, developing abilities necessary for learning the minimized scope of knowledge. It allows young learners to acquire skills sufficient enough to be engaged in verbal contact with another communicant, to join the dialogue, receive and impart elementary information related to the topic of communication. In addition, the defined tasks contribute to the in-depth and comprehensive development of every pupil's individuality, realization of their personal experience, mastering the fundamentals of foreign language communication specificity.

To achieve this goal teachers ought to develop a positive motivation for learning a foreign language, to establish partnership relations with pupils that will ensure sustained interest to learning. Motivation promotes the emergence of satisfaction and interest to cooperative activities.

Methodological challenges of MAS are:

- to expand the language capabilities of pupils within a communicative framework;
- to make the process of learning a foreign language desirable, interesting, fascinating and thereby generate a positive attitude to learning;
- to approximate the process of learning a foreign language to unconstrained communication;
- to attract verbal communication experience in the native language and transfer it to communication in a foreign language and vice versa;
- to cultivate positive character traits, moral standards and culture of communication;
- to acquaint pupils with sociocultural peculiarities of the countries, the language of which they study.

Formation of linguistic competence of primary school children is realized in the course of multiple usage of speech patterns in communicative situations. Socio-cultural competence is formed via generally accepted rules of etiquette, behavior, learning songs and poems or playing games.

Educational component of the program is aimed at pupil's assimilation of practical language skills at a level sufficient enough to carry out communication in foreign language. Focusing on the needs of a pupil ensures intensification and improvement of the educational process, in which the instructor is not the only source of information, but rather a source of assistance for pupils, advisor, leader, organizer and facilitator of the learning process. Using MAS technology, the teacher enables children to become active participants of the learning process, as their individual activities become the core of the whole process and they are the main subjects of it. The atmosphere of the lesson, the tasks proposed, chosen forms of stimulating pupils to expand their general education and linguistic horizons, accumulation of communicative experience, that provides dynamics of the lesson and retains the atmosphere of childhood, all these factors together constitute the prerequisite for the development of pupil's natural or innate inclinations and capacities (one of the basic principles of humanistic pedagogy).

The program takes into account the criteria laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and implies the construction of the educational process on the basis of communicative approach and takes into account individual characteristics of pupils. The basic principles of the communication-oriented teaching, widely used in associative learning, are:

- the principle of interactivity;
- the principle of speech and cogitative activity;
- the principle of integration;
- the principle of contextualization;

While working under these principles, the teacher models the real context of communication through combination of verbal and nonverbal communication means, visual and aural presentation of

content and form. Thus, associative learning ensures acquisition of all kinds of speech activity in their actual natural sequence and relationships.

The method of associative symbols (MAS) makes it possible to solve the main problems of teaching foreign languages to primary school children, as it is based on the modern theory of language learning through «personal activity» of a child. Using the method of associative symbols at foreign language lessons enables every child to perceive language material through all analyzers: visual, auditory, speech-motor and motor. Not breaking the procedure of the lesson, we fully satisfy the needs of the child for motor activity. Lesson has a clear structure and actualizes *three basic stages* of learning a foreign language process:

- 1) Acquaintance with the meanings of lexical units (both simple and complex).
- 2) Passive speech – comprehensive memorizing of verbal expressions, multiple comparison of a linguistic unit with the relevant objects and phenomena of reality.
- 3) Active speech – use of the memorized words or phrases in a pupil's speech acts. This stage determines a level of their speaking skills development.

The method of associative symbols is play-oriented. Therein lies its main advantage over the traditional methods of teaching. This method of teaching allows to develop in children concentration skills, independent thinking, attention and discipline. The elements of game-playing make learning interesting, create a cheerful mood at the lesson, facilitate overcoming difficulties in learning. MAS makes it possible to turn a complicated topical material into simple, makes dull learning process interesting and exciting. Children move and speak at the same time. They understand everything, because language and movements intertwine.

As the method of associative symbols suggests, a teacher introduces game commands, names of objects, phenomena and their characteristics using the associative symbols. The classroom activity is organized according to the following algorithm:

- working out/creating associative symbols to the new lexical items;
- verification of understanding the associative symbols created by pupils in their native language;
- presentation and playing out the new foreign language vocabulary in different situations using the generated symbols.
- The stage of passive speech is implemented via different games, which contribute to further use of language of movements, gestures, facial expressions supplemented with visual materials. Using this method, children learn language practically, «living through» all the learning material, that provides a conscious acquisition of lexical units. The problem of memory overloading disappears, because the process of learning goes on spontaneously. Schoolchildren absorb significant amounts of educational material, performing joint actions, playing games with adults or by themselves. It makes possible to perform these actions automatically and articulate speech samples without any special efforts.
- Creating associative image-symbols, we just «animate» every word and can play an interesting exciting game with it. Practice shows that a foreign language playful learning environment increases the effectiveness of learning. Furthermore, games follow specific rules and thus provide a structured and manageable framework for many learning processes. For example, imagine how interesting and exciting for schoolchildren it is to «go» with friends for an imaginary walk to an imaginary park, comment on what they see (trees, bushes, flowers, grass, squirrel, bird, butterfly), run about the park, jump, play football, catch butterflies, lie in the sun, hold a picnic with friends and so on. And all these exciting events happen in a relatively short period of time, in the English classroom, while sitting at desks. We can also play a game of «imaginary tree». One of the participants represents a tree (highly raised-up hands), others perform various actions on it, making rhymes: one, two, three – *Go to the tree*; one, two, three – *Run to the tree*; one, two, three – *Hop to the tree*; one, two, three – *Fly to the tree* and so on. The use of associative symbols, creating conditions close to life situations, makes it possible to memorize material spontaneously, transform the learning process into the unconstrained perception. Therefore, mastering even a relatively great amount of language material does not cause memory overloading. The benefits of the method lie in the fact, that using absolutely no-cost effective technologies a teacher can always conduct high-quality lessons every day, but not just specifically prepared in the specially created conditions.

– Let us consider in detail the peculiarities of the MAS technology implementation. Before introduction of the new lexical material in foreign language teacher agrees with pupils upon the symbols of sign language they will use to represent this or that object, phenomenon or action, commenting it in native language. Native language is used only to explain the associative symbols. It is enough to show a child only once how to use sign language to represent objects (a river – 1; forest – 2; park – 3; Zoo – 4; how to perform certain actions (read a book – 1; play with a ball – 2; watch TV – 3; play the computer games – 4) and he will become an active participant of play activity in the classroom. Presentation of any educational material is held according to the basic algorithm: 1) agreement on the way to represent an associative symbol; 2) testing the understanding of this symbol; 3) pronouncing new vocabulary units with simultaneous presentation of the associative symbols corresponding to their meanings.

– For instance, when studying the topic «Flat» teacher, relying on the bright children's imagination, presents to the pupils or invents together with them associative image-symbols for the names of the pieces of furniture. Here are some of them: «Bed» – straightened right hand touches the middle of the palm of the left, set in a vertical position; «Table» – arms are interconnected in a «T» position; «Chair» – compressed in a fist one hand in a vertical position rest against the open palm of the other hand; «Wardrobe» – kept together in the horizontal position two hands, clenched in a fist, are associated with sliding doors, which will «open» and «close».

– Every teacher is free in representing a particular object, situation or action, e. i he does it in his own way. What really matters is that children could understand the teacher and he could understand them. Creative teaching and learning activities are satisfied by the possibility for teachers and pupils to improvise, introduce changes and modifications to the designed symbols. Children tend to participate enthusiastically in this process, because the material is taught in an interesting, entertaining way, as if playing a game. Dialogue «teacher – a pupil» is held at the level of understandable for both of them images and symbols. Having explained how to create relevant association symbols, we must verify whether pupils have understood and memorized them in a proper way, and only then begin to articulate new language units in a foreign language, e. i we work in terms of the models: *Look, Listen and Do!*; *Listen and Do!*; *Do and Say!*. Pupils are engaged in active learning process – they are all active participants of the game / role-playing performance. Sound-signals are deposited in the memory on a subconscious level, therefore we deal with involuntary/spontaneous memorization of educational material.

– The use of visual aids by a teacher significantly improves memorization, as children are characterized by highly-developed visual memory. However, with the accumulation of educational material constant usage of visuality becomes impossible. The use of associative symbol-images significantly facilitates the work of teachers and contributes to a better semantization of words. For example, having shown once in the English classroom a symbolic image of a cat – «*mustache*» and calling this image «a cat» instead of Ukrainian «kit», we create an association between the symbol and its image-verbal sounding, and as a result there will not be any problems with reproduction of this lexical unit in speech.

– We know that a child learns a foreign word much faster, if it is associated with a particular image or effect. Thus, the method of associative symbols is one of the most effective ways of lexical units semantization and extremely facilitates the work of teachers. The process of learning new words and expressions turns into a fun.

– Having established a direct close contact with pupils, a teacher, at the moment of creating the symbol-image of a lexical unit, articulates its name in the language, which is studied. Children at the moment of image creation hear a sound, which is associated with an imaginary object in their memory or an action and what else. It is important to mention that pupils are active participants of the process, because they portray all lexical items using the language of movements, gestures, facial expressions. This is the easiest way to establish communication environment in vitro study of a foreign language, and provide optimum use of all the analyzers, e. i total physical response is actualized, which ensures the successful acquisition of a language.

– For example, when studying the topic «Animals» we create image-symbols, simulating: 1) *a piggy* – we make funny snout, having locked up thumb and forefinger in a circle and pressing them to the nose; 2) *horse* – lowered down and clenched in fists hands symbolize imaginary hooves; 3) *cat* – applied to the upper lip forefingers and middle fingers represent imaginary mustache; 4) *cow* – hold forefingers close to your head, simulating long horns etc. Make sure that pupils have remembered suggested images-symbols in a proper way.

– An important aspect and advantage of using the method of associative symbols is that children do not get tired at all during the lesson.

– Working by the method of associative symbols a teacher has an opportunity to repeat systematically speech patterns, which is a prerequisite for developing automatism in a foreign language communication. Repeating the material the teacher often adds some new details, extending the knowledge of a child about the notions and facts being learned and thus promotes better assimilation of the material. Pupils get more interested in learning, when the depicted by them objects, for example, *furniture*, become the centre of specific actions in the classroom: *point to the chair; touch the table; come to the TV; run to the bed; wash the fridge*. There are different ways to organize game-playing activity. We can, for instance, simulate the fulfilment of actions aimed at a present object just sitting at desks or coming up to the objects. It is a great delight for children to come up or run up to «wardrobe», imitated by one of the participants of the game, «open it» and name the items of clothes, which «hang» in it, «shut the wardrobe», and so on. It is particularly interesting to the little schoolchildren, for example, when a toy monkey performs ridiculous actions on the «wardrobe»: running, jumping, dancing, stomping feet. Suddenly there appears a mouse in the «wardrobe» which sits down on a dress, a skirt, a jacket, a shirt and so on. The toy mouse is either *on* a wardrobe, or *under* it, or *in* the wardrobe again. Another exciting and favorite game is «playing the piano». Pupils one by one come up to the imaginary piano, presented by their group mate, and start playing, pressing imaginary piano keys. You can sing familiar English songs to the music performed. Many positive emotions are caused by some other games, such as imitated hut (two children are facing each other, having raised up their hands, they press them palms to palms). You can come up, run up, fly, crawl, log in, etc. and perform various other actions in such a hut.

– **Conclusions.** This approach to teaching foreign languages enables us to play out massive amounts of linguistic material and it has a number of advantages, pupils enjoy getting out of their chairs and moving around. Simple activities do not require a great deal of preparation on the part of the teacher. This method of teaching a foreign language to young learners is aptitude-free, working well with a mixed-ability class, and even with pupils having various disabilities. It is good for kinesthetic learners who need to be active in the class. Class size need not be a problem, and it works most effectively with the beginners.

– From early school age children are immersed in a natural and understandable for them environment, that promotes the development of searching abilities. Working by the method of associative symbols, a teacher plans each lesson so as to motivate the pupils to creative activity, to form a harmoniously developed personality of a pupil. In addition, the method of associative symbols allows teachers to present and assimilate linguistic material in an interesting, easy-accessible form. The rate of assimilation and the quality of it is extremely high. In the course of such learning children acquire linguistic, speech and socio-cultural competence, stipulated by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Prospects. In general, the analysis of current psychological studies and experimental data shows that training and education of young learners heighten the need for original methods and strategies that enable pupils and teachers to cope with many difficulties of mastering the English language in a new and effective way. Associative learning strategy in teaching foreign languages to primary school pupils can be adapted for all kinds of teaching situations – you just need to use your imagination and creativity.

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