



## The Impact Of Storytelling In The Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

Storytelling, the art of narrating a tale from memory rather than reading it is one of the oldest of all art forms, reaching back to prehistoric times. Many EFL teachers are interested in storytelling as a resource in teaching. A successful storyteller chooses adequate stories and must be a good performer, for the delivery is crucial and requires both preparation and rehearsal. Storytelling is the original form of teaching and has the potential of fostering emotional intelligence and help the child gain insight into human behavior. Moreover, storytelling can provide a motivating and low anxiety context for language learning. In the current article, I am also going to shed light on some storytelling tips which are meant to help the teacher—as storyteller as s/he prepares for a storytelling "performance" for students.

### KEYWORDS

Adaptation, motivation, oral stories, preparation, selection, skills, storytelling, teaching

### INTRODUCTION

Children learn and create their mother tongue not by sitting at their desks doing pencil and paper tasks in isolation from their peers, or drilling structures out of context, but by interacting with and manipulating language and by engaging in meaningful use of language in a community of language learners. As a matter of fact, some educators

claim that the traditional reading skill time is difficult, and actually even painful for many children. [1, 68p] If fragmented skill lessons, workbooks, and endless worksheets are not the best way for L1 learners to develop their language and master the art of reading and writing, they must be much less appropriate for young foreign language learners who need

to learn a whole new language. These students need to learn to listen, to speak, to read, and to write in a new language, often without exposure to English outside school. Because language is an interactive process, children learning a language need ample opportunity to interact in a meaningful, interesting context and play with the language while developing vocabulary and structures. They need the collaboration of their peers and teachers in creating meaningful contexts and negotiating meanings in those contexts. Storytelling is the original form of teaching. There are still societies in which it is the only form of teaching. Though attempts have been made to imitate or update it, like the electronic storytelling of television, live oral storytelling will never go out of fashion. A simple narrative will always be the cornerstone of the art of teaching. Colloquial or literary, unaffected or flowery—the full range of language is present in stories. While listening to stories, children develop a sense of structure that will later help them to understand the more complex stories of literature. “Literature is a high point of language usage, arguably it marks the greatest skill a language user can demonstrate. Anyone who wants to acquire a profound knowledge of language that goes beyond the utilitarian will read literary texts in that language” [2, 47p]

#### **Literacy Skills Developed:**

1. Both telling and listening to stories instill a sense of joy in language and words that make children want to read.
2. Listening to and telling stories stimulate the powers of imagination and visualization, which are keys to comprehension and higher order thinking.

3. In telling stories students develop their oral communication skills, which are a critical tool for real world success.
4. Students who struggle with writing can build on oral language strengths to improve their writing skills.
5. As student storytellers dramatically consider and convey plot, characters and emotions to an audience, they develop a visceral understanding of story structure, which increases their reading comprehension skills.

#### **Social And Personal Skills Developed:**

1. Through learning and sharing tales, then coaching each other in a positive manner, a class develops a spirit of community and cooperation.
2. Folktales teach about compassion, courage, honesty and other important qualities in an accessible and compelling way that helps children build stronger character.
3. Students increase their confidence and self-esteem as they work to develop a story, then receive positive attention from peers.
4. As they read, learn, tell and listen to international folktales, students expand their appreciation of different cultures.

There are five ways to use storytelling in the classroom that you can follow:

**Share your own experiences.** When you know you are trying to teach a difficult concept, teach your class with a story of how you managed to understand and remember the concept when you were in their shoes. Explaining the theory of gravity is a hard concept for students to grasp, but by telling a story, they may understand that although we are visibly fixed firmly to the ground, there are

forces of gravity constantly working against us.

**Use a story to introduce a topic.** At the start of a lesson, use a story as a way of introducing a new topic. If you can't think of any with ease, you may find some ready-made ones on the Internet External link that might fit your topic. Do remember that copied material, whether it's written text or the spoken word, should not be used in its original form as you may be breaching copyright rules.

**Use a story to illustrate a concept.** Occasionally, straight figures and facts don't necessarily make for easy understanding, so throw in a narrative to help your class retain these hard facts.

**Nurture listening skills.** As young people progress through their early years, listening skills become increasingly important, and there's no better way to improve attention span and listening skills than by telling stories to keep them attentive. Of course, as useful as storytelling is, the stories should be relevant to the curriculum material for students to reap any benefits.

**Storytelling attracts less motivated students.** Many kids these days are completely turned off old-fashioned textbooks and even sitting behind a computer screen does not help much. However, storytelling with a useful theme may engage the more lethargic learner. These are the students who you may engage the most if you throw in a few interesting stories to keep them motivated.

Storytelling is an age-old art shared among friends, families and strangers, and its presence can captivate young and even older learners in the classroom too. Stories come in different forms and consider these four

different types of stories and use any of them in your class:

- -One of your true life stories;
- A true story but not your own;
- -A story back in time;
- -A fictional story

### **Grammar and Vocabulary through Storytelling**

With these stories you can demonstrate your students how grammar and in particular way the tenses are used in storytelling. For example, if you're telling a story of an event back in time, you'll be using the past tense to describe the events. Similarly, a fictional story used as the basis for events you may predict will happen in the future, the bulk of the story will be told in the future tense. Of course, some stories may use different tenses depending on when a certain event is taking place.

One of the important features of storytelling is exciting the listener's mind so that he and she were captivated by the story you're telling. One of the best ways of doing this is to use appropriate nouns, adverbs and adjectives. Those that depict color and actions are particularly forceful when attracting and keeping readers' attention. [3, 157p]

### **Supporting children's understanding**

For the preparatory work and for many of the activities related to the storytelling, only the teacher requires a copy of the storybook. This is because a majority of the tasks are based on the pupils' predicting what comes next in the story or recapping it from memory. If they see the storybook at this stage much of the surprise element and active involvement is lost. You may find that at the end of a lesson you will have to be especially vigilant to stop your pupils peeping in the book when your back is turned. Pupils

positively enjoy hearing stories over and over again. Their confidence grows as they realize that they can remember more and more. It also presents them with the challenge of remembering new language. Participating in the storytelling becomes a kind of game activity.

For stories with beginner pupils you may have to use the mother tongue from time to time. If your class shares a common language, this is quite natural. In fact, you would be denying your pupils a very useful learning strategy if you insisted on always using English. However, you should consider carefully when and why you would use the mother tongue. Obviously, the more you use English and the more your pupils get better at and more familiar with the language, the less you will need to use the mother tongue. [4, 34p]

Using storybooks successfully in the classroom needs careful planning. Simply telling a story to a class without preparation can be disastrous with the loss of pupil attention, motivation and self-confidence. Although children are used to listening to stories in their mother tongue, understanding a story in a foreign language is hard work. Pupil's enjoyment will increase enormously if the teacher ensures that their understanding is supported in several ways. The following guidelines provide a framework to make story-based lessons more accessible:

- Provide a context for the story and introduce the main characters. Help your
  - pupils feel involved and link their experience with that in the story to set the scene.
  - Relate the story to aspects of their own lives such as where they live, the animals they are familiar with, what they like or dislike, going shopping, having picnics,
- etc. Once the context has been understood and the children can identify with the characters, then elicit key vocabulary and phrases, and involve pupils in predicting and participating in the story.
- Provide visual support: drawings on the blackboard, cut-out figures, speech bubbles, masks, real objects, flash cards, etc. Can pupils make any of these?
  - Identify your linguistic objectives. Decide which language points your pupils
  - need to recognize for comprehension when the story is told and which would be useful to reproduce such as lexical sets, language functions and structures, etc.
  - Relate the story or associated activities to work in other subject areas if possible.
  - Decide how long you will spend on the story. Will you use it once or twice or
  - over a period of several lessons?
  - Decide when you will read the story. Will you read a little each lesson—or all at
  - once after appropriate preparation?
  - Decide which follow-up activities would provide opportunities for pupils to use language
  - Decide in which order to introduce or revise the language necessary for understanding the story. Make sure pupils understand the aims of each lesson and how it relates to the story. Check that each lesson provides variety and the opportunity for recycling language previously introduced.
  - If necessary, modify the story to make it more accessible to your pupils. Substitute unfamiliar words with better-known ones and adapt the sentence structure to make the story easier to follow, and so on.
  - Find out if there are any rhymes or songs that pupils can learn to reinforce the language introduced.

### **Some aids for effective storytelling**

To build children's storytelling skills, Plourde (1985) recommends activities that focus on role playing, generating character, helping students find an appropriate voice, and developing the ability to make logical conclusions. Plourde elaborates on a dozen techniques appropriate for children in kindergarten through grade 6. One, for example, has the teacher or one child relate the beginning of a familiar fairy tale and another child make up an entirely new ending. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1984) offers several suggestions for making low-cost crafts materials that facilitate storytelling. Among them is the construction of a simple mini-cinema illustrating sequential events of a story. These stages of the story may then be presented with a flexible strip of drawings operated by pulling a string.

Gross and Batchelder (1986) present exercises for older elementary and middle school students designed to improve group dynamics and create a learning environment for storytelling. One technique involves using a circle to practice games inspired by modern dance education and native American rituals. These exercises help older students who are apt to be self-conscious to become more confident, willing to participate, and supportive of the storytelling process.

Music—classical or popular, recorded or live—can also be used to set the scene for storytelling, as can puppets and other simple props. [5,219p] But effective storytelling is a versatile strategy that stirs the imagination and enables children to visualize with few or no visual aids at all.

For a classroom teacher who wishes to use storytelling, it is best to begin by choosing a

simple story with only a few characters and an uncomplicated plot. The story should have action, the plot should be understandable to the listeners, and the events of the story should have a definite climax that leads to a conclusion the students will find satisfactory. Folk and fairy tales are the easiest kinds of stories for beginning storytellers to communicate [6, 91p]. In selecting these or any story, it is important to keep in mind the age of the children in the audience. Scott (1985) advises the storyteller to be flexible, to expect unexpected reactions, and to remember that enjoyment the first and chief consideration.

Scott and other researchers (e.g., Ramey, 1986) emphasize that a storyteller need not be a "performer," but rather a person who has good memory and listening skills, who sincerely likes the story chosen for telling, and who knows the story so well that it can be recreated for an audience without any uncertainty or panic. Storytellers who are too "actorish" usually fascinate the audience, but at the expense of the story.

The second consideration in effective storytelling should be to encourage exploration and experimentation with language (Schwartz, 1987). Constructing meaning through use of language is an implicit goal in storytelling. A language development focus can recommend retelling. Stories that are told and retold develop a patina with each new telling. Children's participation in storytelling provides not only novelty to stimulate the child's curiosity, but also enough familiarity to allow a child to perceive relationships and to experience success at using language [7,85p]



## CONCLUSION

Stories educate, illustrate, enlighten, and inspire. They give relief from the routine and stimulate the mind. They are a great motivator for teachers as well as for students. Stories are used in an exclusively positive scholastic setting, i.e., no grades, no failures, no textbooks, no notepads, no dictionaries, no costly audiovisual equipment nothing coming between the listener and the teller. Storytelling is learned slowly over a long time, but the novice and the expert storyteller can both experience success on different levels. A storyteller eventually makes a personal collection of stories for various occasions and purposes. Storytelling is a folk-art which can't be manipulated, intellectualized, or mass-produced. Its magic is unique. The storyteller is always a teacher, and the teacher is always a storyteller. All teaching methods and suggestions in this article may be adapted to different grade and proficiency levels depending upon type of literature chosen.

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