

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF DEVELOPING LEARNERS' ORAL SKILLS THROUGH STORYTELLING

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Abstract:

This article discusses about storytelling which brings language learning alive and creates a participatory and immersive experience that allows Young Learners to enjoy hearing the language in a dynamic, sometimes stylistic and entertaining way. Participation using key vocabulary and phrases can create an awareness of rhythm and structure. This atmosphere of play and creative expression creates an appetite for more similar experiences. Students who have enjoyed storytelling in class often ask for more stories and also feel motivated and encouraged to create and tell, act out or illustrate their own stories in a variety of ways.

Key words : relevant input, literacy, EFL classroom , fluency, pronunciation, listening, activities, acquisition, small talk, conversation.

Stories play an important role in everyday conversation as we all communicate by telling stories about different aspects of life. Everybody loves a good story, especially children. They are already familiar with stories in the mother tongue, and the use of stories in the English classroom offers an effective way of introducing new language in a meaningful and memorable context. Stories increase children's exposure to English and help them build their own vocabulary, involving them directly in their learning process. Stories are unquestionably a significant tool in the learning process. They are a rich resource in language learning and teaching but they also offer a wider window on the world, and through them children learn much more than words.

As Mourao says:

“A learner is given a multitude of opportunities to use the language of the picturebook, a language that is made up of pictures and the words, for their aesthetic and cultural development, cognitive and emotional development, and language and literacy development.” This article discusses the importance and the possibilities of



using stories in language learning, gives advice on creating a unit around stories, showing that they can be used as an alternative to course books.

Why using stories with young learners

Reading at an early age is essential and, in the ELT classroom, stories “can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language as they present language in a familiar and memorable context” . Stories have been described as a successful vehicle to teach English as they offer numerous possibilities of different activities and are highly motivating. Stories can also bring English into other subjects as they provide the starting-point for different activities across the curriculum. Eads summarizes the advantages of storytelling by saying “Telling stories can reduce the stress in classroom, promote literacy, speaking and listening skills, help children to develop thinking strategies and promoting their social and emotional development – and all while they engage in a rewarding and enjoyable activity.”

Slattery & Willis also mention the important role of stories in language acquisition as they say, “Young learners acquire language unconsciously. The activities you do in class should help this kind of acquisition. Stories are the most valuable resource you have. They offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on you can use stories to help children

practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing.”

Cameron states that stories use a holistic approach to language teaching and learning as “stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go.”

Here are some other reasons to use stories:

- Children enjoy and are always eager to listen to stories; they also know how stories work;
- Stories are a rich and versatile resource and children are intrinsically motivated to them;
- They are fun, motivating and can be used in a number of different ways to develop different skills and topics, this way stories also contribute to developing positive attitudes towards language learning;
- They involve children in their learning process;
- They provide endless resources of language in context;
- They are a great way of introducing, practising, revising vocabulary and structures and improving pronunciation and listening skills.



- They improve pronunciation and listening skills. Children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language;
- They foster positive interpersonal attitudes and develop intercultural awareness as they are also a source for cultural content;
- Children feel a sense of achievement after reading a book in English;
- Stories can be used to create whole units of work that constitute mini syllabuses and be an alternative to course books.

The act of storytelling appeals to different learning preferences and personalities ensuring that from the shyest to the most active of students, everyone has a chance to participate in a way that they can enjoy. This ranges from listening quietly to taking part as an actor.

Storytelling also helps students to enjoy and be aware of intonation and tone of voice, natural sounding expressions and phrases as well as interaction between native speakers. For older YLs they offer the opportunity to retell, rephrase, enact or summarise what they've heard, to rewrite the story or to create their own as a group or individual.

In the EFL classroom, oral fluency is a skill that needs consistent practice to see noticeable progress. When we talk about fluency in general, we're talking about the flow of speech, the speed at which students speak, the pauses, and the language that students can readily produce between those pauses. In an ideal world, everyday exposure to the English language via regular communication with English speakers on a variety of topics is the best way to learn to speak English fluently

It is also helpful to think about the function or reasons for incorporating certain speaking tasks in the classroom. If students have a need to use English when they are out in the local community, teachers might have them engage in free conversation or **small talk**, where they focus on skills such as turn-taking or the sharing of personal experiences. If the objective of the speaking activity is to successfully convey a message where it is understood by the listener, teachers might get students to participate in activities such as information gaps, interviews, or role-plays. One example of this would be to get students to practice **making phone calls**, leaving voicemail messages, or **ordering food**. If the objective is to get students to speak in front of an audience, they can practice this through oral presentations or reports, or even through in-class debates.

Providing relevant input

Teachers should give careful consideration to the topics that to select for speaking activities. Research supports the inclusion of familiar and relevant topics which help to sustain student engagement and motivation in speaking activities. With this in mind, try to design speaking activities that create an interest in or need for communicating. Some topics that work well at all levels **include hobbies and free time, daily routines, food, culture, or relationships**. Most teachers would agree that when their students can relate to a topic, their classes are livelier, and students are more eager to participate.

Another thing to keep in mind is to ensure that students have enough input or language to use when participating in speaking tasks. Before conducting a speaking activity, think about whether students have sufficient background knowledge and language to communicate on the topic. For learners who have difficulty speaking on the spot, scaffold the speaking activity and start with a warm-up.¹ We can **brainstorm** words as a class or get them to create word maps with graphic organizers. It also helps to provide access to topic vocabulary, phrases, or main ideas to provide learners with context. Other ways to provide input are by giving students a short reading on the assigned topic, or simply by giving students a minute or two to quickly produce a basic outline or mind map if asked to give mini-presentations in small groups. Studies show that preparation time before speaking helps students to process and focus better on speaking tasks and reduces hesitations and stumbles.

Focusing on fluency

A key indicator of more advanced-level language users is good fluency. Fluency has been known to improve when a bit of urgency is introduced to speaking tasks. The 4/3/2 method is an activity used by many teachers that encourages students to speak more fluidly by giving them the chance to manage issues related to pauses and hesitations. This is because the activity involves practicing a talk multiple times, which allows students to account for any errors or issues after each subsequent turn.

The importance of pronunciation

¹ Tien, T. B. (2013). Using short stories to improve speaking skill at pre-intermediate level. Retrieved January 24, 2018, from <https://123doc.org/document/3136407-using-short-stories-to-improve-speaking-skill-of-students-at-preintermediate-level.htm>



For many students, pronunciation is not a significant barrier to attaining fluency. However, it should not be neglected as incorrect pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication. Some students may struggle with pronunciation in English, mainly because there is no one-to-one correspondence between spelling and sound. It is also important for learners to be familiar with stress and intonation in English words and within sentences. For example, certain words can change from nouns to verbs and vice versa just by changing the stress from the first to the second syllable. In natural speech, English words are often connected or chunked together. Native speakers also tend to stress certain words in a sentence for emphasis to convey a particular meaning. A learner, therefore, needs guidance on these particular pronunciation features because they may not be present in their first language. Some activities that can help with pronunciation are, of course, the traditional repetition drills, or ones that ask students to listen and shadow the pronunciation of speakers in English songs or English videos. It is also helpful to practice reading aloud with narrative texts, or even by creating dialogues and having students present them.

I argue that storytelling is centrally important to education research. It would, however, not be an over-exaggeration to say that storytelling in education research has remained largely under-theorized. The proliferation of narrative methodologies, however significant and innovative in the evolution of qualitative studies in education, has not been accompanied by a theoretical body that has captured the complexities – ethical and methodological – inherent in such work.

Final thoughts

Developing oral fluency takes time and effort on the part of the student, and effective planning, guidance, and patience on the part of the teacher. With that being said, we can see that many factors need to be considered before conducting speaking activities. Teachers need to determine the speaking skills that students need to work on and whether the students have sufficient or relevant input. It is also important to include useful lists of fixed conversational phrases or chunks and to teach strategies that can help students sustain conversations. We've also discussed the effectiveness of setting time limits such as the widely used 4/3/2 method and some key aspects of pronunciation. Finally, the way that feedback is implemented during speaking activities is of utmost importance, as this can make or break the success of a speaking activity as well as your students' ability to progress or develop fluency. By taking

these factors into account, teachers can help their students to develop into more confident and competent speakers of English.

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