

## THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING IN THE CLASSROOM

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**Abstraction.** Storytelling is about the art of reciting a tale from memory rather than reading, it is regarded to be one of the oldest of all art forms, dating back to prehistoric times. Majority of EFL teachers find it spellbinding resource in teaching. Storytelling is the original form of teaching and has the potential of promoting emotional intelligence and help the child gain insight into human behavior. Moreover, It can provide a motivating and low anxiety context for language learning. In this article, I am also going to clarify some storytelling tips which are meant to be of help to the teacher—as storyteller as s/he prepares for a storytelling "performance" for students.

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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.

#### **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 gain 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 fire young and even older learners's imagination 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.

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]

### **Some recommendations 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 wants 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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