

STORIES IN TEACHING LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This article explores the efficacy of integrating storytelling into language teaching methodologies. Drawing upon diverse theoretical frameworks, it examines the role of narratives in facilitating language acquisition and cultural understanding. Through a review of existing literature and empirical evidence, the article elucidates the cognitive and socio-cultural benefits of utilizing stories as pedagogical tools. Practical strategies for implementing narrative-based approaches in language classrooms are delineated, catering to various proficiency levels and linguistic contexts. Ultimately, this research underscores the transformative potential of stories in enriching language education paradigms, fostering engagement, and nurturing intercultural competence among learners.

Key words: stories, folktales, familiar contexts, authentic language use, types of stories, storytelling, development of language skills by stories.

ИСТОРИИ В ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация: В этой статье исследуется эффективность интеграции рассказывания историй в методики преподавания языка. Опираясь на разнообразные теоретические основы, он исследует роль нарративов в содействии овладению языком и культурному пониманию. Путем обзора существующей литературы и эмпирических данных статья раскрывает когнитивные и социокультурные преимущества использования историй в качестве педагогического инструмента. Описаны практические стратегии внедрения повествовательных подходов в языковых классах с учетом различных уровней владения языком и лингвистических контекстов. В конечном итоге, это исследование подчеркивает преобразующий потенциал историй в обогащении парадигм языкового образования, стимулировании взаимодействия и развитии межкультурной компетентности среди учащихся.

Ключевые слова: рассказы, народные сказки, знакомые контексты, аутентичное использование языка, типы рассказов, рассказывание историй, развитие языковых навыков рассказами.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is not merely about memorizing vocabulary and mastering grammar rules; it is about acquiring the ability to communicate effectively in real-world contexts. In the realm of English language teaching (ELT), one potent tool that educators can leverage to facilitate this process is the use of stories and contexts familiar to students. By integrating narratives and scenarios that resonate with learners' lived experiences, educators can enhance engagement, comprehension, and language acquisition. This article explores the pedagogical rationale behind this approach and provides practical strategies for its implementation. M. Mixon and P. Temu wrote an article about stories and storytelling after studying the opinions and views of several scientists and linguists. I support their views on this matter and I would like to quote their views in this article.

Understanding the Pedagogical Rationale:

At the heart of using familiar stories and contexts lies the principle of relevance. When students encounter narratives and situations that mirror their own lives, interests, and cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to engage actively and meaningfully with the material. This relevance not only fosters intrinsic motivation but also facilitates deeper comprehension and retention of language concepts. Moreover, familiar contexts provide scaffolding for language acquisition, enabling students to transfer their existing knowledge and skills to new linguistic challenges.

Enhancing Engagement and Motivation:

One of the primary advantages of using familiar stories and contexts in ELT is its ability to enhance student engagement and motivation. Whether through folktales from their cultural heritage, anecdotes from their daily lives, or scenarios inspired by popular media, incorporating familiar elements captures students' interest and stimulates their curiosity. As students see themselves reflected in the material, they are more likely to invest themselves emotionally and intellectually in the learning process, leading to increased participation and enthusiasm.

Facilitating Comprehension and Retention:

Familiar stories and contexts serve as cognitive anchors, providing students with a familiar framework within which to navigate new language content. When presented with vocabulary, grammar structures, and discourse patterns in the context of familiar narratives, students are better able to grasp their meaning and usage. Moreover, the emotional resonance of familiar stories can enhance memory retention, as students are more likely to remember language forms and expressions that are embedded within personally meaningful contexts.

Promoting Authentic Communication:

Language learning is ultimately about communication, and using familiar stories and contexts provides opportunities for authentic language use. When students engage in discussions, role-plays, or writing tasks centered around familiar narratives, they are more likely to communicate spontaneously and fluently. Moreover, these activities promote the development of pragmatic skills, as students learn how language is used in specific social and cultural contexts. By practicing language in authentic situations, students gain the confidence and competence necessary for real-world communication.

Practical Strategies for Implementation:

Integrating familiar stories and contexts into ELT can be achieved through a variety of strategies:

Cultural storytelling: Incorporate folktales, legends, and myths from students' cultural backgrounds into language lessons.

Personal narratives: Encourage students to share anecdotes, experiences, and stories from their own lives.

Popular media: Utilize excerpts from movies, TV shows, songs, and literature that resonate with students' interests and preferences.

Real-world scenarios: Create role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks based on everyday situations familiar to students.

All learners, from babies to grandmothers, learn better with stories. Stories are energizers. When someone says, "Let me tell you a story," listeners perk up their ears and smile. Even hard truths can be taught easily through story. Stories told and read at home and school both entertain and educate young learners. Using stories in the classroom is fun, but the activity should not be considered trivial or frivolous. Indeed, there is strong support for storytelling in pedagogical

theory. Cortazzi (1994)¹ points out that storytelling is fundamental to education and specifically to language teaching. Zipes (1995)² and Morgan and Rinvolutri (1992)³ find stories a basic part of the whole language approach to learning, reaching the “whole person” and appealing to the subconscious. According to Brumfit and Johnson (1979)⁴, reading or telling stories in class is a natural way to learn a new language. Stories—whether they are fairy tales, folktales, legends, fables, or are based on real-life incidents experienced by students themselves—can help learners appreciate and respect the culture and the values of various groups. These stories foster the transformative powers of education. According to Ada (2004)⁵, stories can also lead to harmony, understanding, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Stories from around the world are excellent to use in the classroom, but teachers also need to use stories from the students’ own culture and heritage. Using local or national stories insures that the students know the background culture and may already know the story. This familiarity lowers the young learners’ stress and reduces anxiety in the classroom. According to Krashen (1982)⁶, stories lower the young learners’ affective filter, allowing them to learn more easily. Joseph Campbell(1987)⁷ points out that the themes of folk stories and myths are universal; people everywhere appreciate tales from other groups, even if they aren’t from the listeners’ own culture. But students are especially pleased—and their self esteem is likely to be enhanced—when they learn that a story comes from their own part of the world.

Unfortunately, radio, television, and other technologies are fast replacing the elders who, in traditional family huts, used to tell folktales and fables by the fireplace. Today, parents, children, and grandchildren listening to the radio or watching television are absorbing material divorced from their ancient culture, and little of their heritage is being transmitted. Unless teachers make an effort to continue the tradition of storytelling, today’s children will have little of their culture and heritage to pass on to the next generation.

Stories as solutions to large classes and limited resources

In many countries, a shortage of teaching learning resources is a major constraint. Teachers can use stories to teach language and to introduce other subjects, such as the HIV/AIDS problem. Even in the absence of books, storytelling or reading can enable teachers to manage large classes, such as the 60- to 100-pupil classes seen in Tanzania. In such situations, teachers can exploit stories, enhancing them by using simple objects, to improve the language skills of their students.

Getting started

Collect all types of stories—fairy tales, folk stories, fables, etc.—as well as pictures, children’s books, and small everyday objects or toys.

Types of stories to use:

¹ Cortazzi, M. 1994. Narrative analysis. *Language Teacher* (27): 157–70.

² Zipes, J. 1995. *Creative storytelling*. New York: Routledge.

³ Morgan, J., and M. Rinvolutri. 1992. *Once upon a time: Using stories in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Brumfit, C. J., and K. Johnson, eds. 1979. *The communicative approach to language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Ada, A. F. 2004. *Authors in the classroom: A transformative education process*. Boston: Pearson.

⁶ Krashen, S. 1982. *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

⁷ Campbell, J. 1987. *Primitive mythology: The masks of God*. New York: Penguin Books.

1. Folk stories, fairy tales, legends, fables: start by using stories from the culture of the children. They may know the stories in their native language and this will promote understanding and self-esteem among the learners.

2. Nursery rhymes: A treasure trove of material can be found in English nursery rhyme books.

3. Little stories: These can be longer rhymes: “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” “Three Little Kittens,” “This is the House that Jack Built,” or popular children’s books like Bill Martin’s Brown Bear, or Polar Bear, or Eric Carle’s The Very Hungry Caterpillar, and From Head to Toe.

For speaking skills

1. Storytelling with objects. Use objects such as toys, forks, cups, to trigger stories. For example, divide learners into groups of three to five, and distribute four to five objects to each group. Ask each group to make up a story that includes all of their objects. First, model the activity by choosing five objects from the box of objects (e.g., a car, a spoon, a girl, a banana, a monkey). Then tell the learners an impromptu story, which might go like this: A long time ago a girl was walking along a road carrying a spoon and a banana. A fast car passed by her. She was scared. She dropped the banana and the spoon and ran into the trees. When she came back, she saw the monkey eating the banana with the spoon. She laughed at the monkey. A story this simple will give the students confidence that they can tell a story, too. After the groups create stories, have each group tell its story to another group or to the whole class.

2. Storytelling with pictures. Use pictures in the same way as objects were used in the first activity. Distribute four to five pictures to each group, making sure each person has one picture. Ask each group to make up a story that includes all the pictures. Each person adds to the story using ideas suggested by his or her own picture.

For listening skills

1. Read or tell simple stories to the students. You can use pictures or the small objects. Telling stories has certain advantages over reading in that the teacher-teller can hold the attention of the learners with the power of eye contact, while at the same time permitting the teacher to observe how well the students are following the story. Telling allows you to use your body more than you do when reading.

2. After the initial telling, have the learners tell the story. This technique is most effective if it involves several students. Choose one person to start re-telling the story, then call on others to continue the story, letting each child say one to three sentences until the whole story has been retold. If a child gets confused and misses something important, or remembers it wrong, the teacher can make a correction.

For reading

1. Find a version of a tale that the children can read. If this can’t be done, re-write a story that you know, simplifying it by deleting the difficult words or by changing them into words that the learners know or words that you want to teach them.

2. Read the story aloud the first time, or let the learners read the story silently the first time. (The latter approach allows the teacher to devote time to learners who need help with reading.) A third option is to let the students read the story aloud, with each child reading one sentence. This provides an opportunity to help students with pronunciation.

3. One method of introducing a story is choral reading, which involves the teacher reading a phrase or sentence and the class repeating it. Read the story quickly, using a

chant-like rhythm. Students improve their intonation and pronunciation with this method. Choral reading is possible even if the students do not have a copy of the story, in which case it also becomes a listening activity.

4. Caution: After the first reading, ask comprehension questions to find out what the students understood. Help them with parts of the story they do not understand.

5. Important: use the same story for several different activities. One story provides rich material for other activities, such as discussion of values, role play, creating small playlets, even creating individual books.

For writing

1. Have the learners draw or paint a scene or character from a story and then write at least one line from the story under the picture.

2. Use a variation of the speaking activities above (storytelling with objects or storytelling with pictures). After the learners create the story, have the group dictate it as one person writes it down. Once the stories are complete, this can be turned into a speaking activity, with each group reading/telling its story to the class.

3. Have students each write their own story, using objects or pictures. Then they can compare their stories within small groups.

Combining skills: Enhancing critical thinking and creativity

1. Students retell the story. Through oral retelling, students can demonstrate their comprehension of a story. Help students by emphasizing the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Then have students, working in pairs, retell the story first to each other and later to the entire class.

2. Use Total Physical Response (TPR). Select four verbs from a story and place them on index cards. Say each word and model its action. After the students know the first four verbs, add more.

3. Make a story timeline. Have students list the events of the story in the order in which they occur, using simple words. Assist the students by asking questions such as: “What happens first?” “What happens next?”

4. Read the story repeatedly. Introduce a story by asking the students to predict what it is about by looking at its pictures. Pre-teach vocabulary; then read the story several times.

5. Tell the story. Instead of reading the story to the class, tell it or have a student tell it.

6. Create a story board. Have students do simple line drawings of the story in time sequence such as is found in an animated movie or comic book.

7. Rewrite a story. Have the students rewrite a familiar story in a simplified form.

8. Create a chant from the story. Using a story that features repetitive language, ask questions such as, “Who is it?” “What is it doing?” Use a question chart on the board and pictures, or draw simple stick pictures. For example, “Have you seen my cat? This is not my cat.” or “Did the hippo kill the tortoise? No, he didn’t kill the tortoise.”

9. Teach sentence patterns. Again using a book that features repetitive speech, write the sentence patterns on the board. Then have the students create new sentences to fit the patterns. Some examples are: “Who is sleeping in MY bed?” (from Goldilocks and the Three Bears) and “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?” (from Brown Bear).

10. Create story cards. Take short stories, such as fables, and put them on cards or construction paper. Have students, working in pairs, read the stories and then tell them to their partner.

11. Do jigsaw reading. Separate a story into four equal parts. Number each part and post each one in a different corner of the room. Divide the students into groups of four and have students in each group number off from one to four. Then ask students to go to the corner that matches their number and silently read the story piece there. They then return to their seats and write down from memory what they recall of the story. After they finish writing, in numerical order each student tells the others in the group his or her part of the story.

12. Use story theater.

a. Divide a folktale into 4 or 5 parts for a class of 20.

b. Form groups of 4 to 5 students. (For larger classes, have several groups of 20).

c. Give each group a section of the story. Have students read their section and decide which character they would like to play. If there are not enough parts in their section, have those without parts work together as a choral narrator, freely adapting descriptions into narration. They may choose any props on hand and use any actions.

d. Allow students to practice their section of the story for 15 to 20 minutes.

e. Ask students within each group to line up according to the story's sequence and to either read or perform the story as seamlessly as possible. An excellent description of how to use story theater can be found in Hines (1995).

13. Create books. Have students create their own books, either by retelling an existing story, or by making up a story of their own.

14. Dictate short stories. To improve listening skills and help students practice their spelling, dictate short stories to the students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of storytelling into language teaching emerges as a dynamic and effective pedagogical strategy with manifold benefits. Through the synthesis of theoretical insights and empirical evidence, this article has illuminated the transformative power of narratives in language education. From enhancing linguistic proficiency to fostering cultural empathy and critical thinking skills, stories serve as catalysts for meaningful engagement and deep learning. As educators navigate the complexities of diverse linguistic contexts and learner needs, the utilization of storytelling offers a versatile and accessible approach to promoting communicative competence and intercultural understanding. Moving forward, continued exploration and innovation in narrative pedagogy hold immense promise for shaping inclusive, engaging, and impactful language learning experiences worldwide.

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