

## Storytelling in EFL Classes

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Received: September 25, 2015    Accepted: November 15, 2015    Online Published: December 1, 2015

**Abstract:** Storytelling is one of the oldest ways of education and oral tradition that is continuously being used to transfer the previous nation's cultures, tradition and customs. It constructs a bridge between the new and the old. Storytelling in EFL classes usually provides a meaningful context, interesting atmosphere and is used as a tool to highly motivate students. Although it seems to be mostly based on speaking, it is used to promote other skills such as writing, reading, and listening. Storytelling is mainly regarded to be grounded on imitation and repetition; nevertheless many creative activities can be implemented in the classroom since this method directs learners to use their imaginations. This study discusses the importance of storytelling as a teaching method, and it outlines the advantages of storytelling in EFL classes.

**Keywords:** Storytelling, Motivate, Creative, EFL Classes

### 1. Introduction

Students need to interact with their peers to acquire and generate language and practice new structures in order to be able to function in their society. Developing gradually in language learning requires interaction of the people, interesting and meaningful context, peaceful classroom atmosphere and engaging in the use of language structures. Children at their preliminary learning stage develop oral language skill rather than being able to write. They repeat the words or phrases what they hear from their teachers even though they cannot recognize the format of writing; however, remarkably repetition can provoke a notable advancement in vocabulary and structures (Dujmovic, 2006).

Regarding the language development steps, Chomsky (1972) points out that especially young children are not taught language in any formality; however, they acquire it naturally for that reason adults should supply interesting and encouraging atmosphere for the children.

Spaulding (2011, p.14) also seems to agree with Chomsky on acquiring the language naturally, and he indicates this issue in his book called "The Art of Storytelling" as:

Welcome and congratulations. You are a storyteller! Each of us is a storyteller from the moment we are born and cry out our first sounds: "Here I am! Where am I?" Perhaps it is not in formal language, but it is an easily understandable communication, telling the story of life. Storytelling enables us to be both lamp and mirror at the same moment. As a storyteller, we can present stories composed by someone else and thus reflect that person's idea; as listener, we can create the story in our own minds while mirroring back

to the teller our experience of listening to the story. Either way, storytelling is joyful, full of life, and incorporating the joy of both the story and the event.

Considering Spaulding's (2011) attitudes to the storytelling, it is possible to say that people are already innate storyteller, and they shape the incidents according to their imaginations. Furthermore, people use the story as a means to explore and enjoy their feelings and ideas.

Regarding to other teaching methods, storytelling may provide the learners more advantages to evolve in language learning. Not only are students introduced the new form of the language but they are also stimulated to reason the events in the story or make their own endings depending on their imagination and creativity. As a storyteller in the classroom, a teacher should make a sensation amongst the students, put forth questions or deliver answers. In order not to turn the lesson to preach, a teacher should avoid putting certain borders in students' minds; also he/she should remember that entertainment is necessary to keep telling the story (Spaulding, 2011). Wright (1997) indicates the stories depend much more on vocabulary and provide a wide and stable language experience for the students.

Storytelling is categorized into three stages: *pre-story* stage which includes warm-up activities that enable students to get ready for listening through presenting target vocabulary and using some realia like posters to capture the learners' attention to the story. The second step is *in-story* part that helps the students understand the context without worrying due to the pleasure in the atmosphere. The last step is *post-story* which contains follow up activities or telling the story that promotes students' anticipation skill or creativity (Ying-Li, 2010). The most important materials for storytelling are sounds, words, and language figures. Storytellers use voice, face, hands; that is, mimes and gestures (Dujmovic, 2006).

## 2. Why Storytelling

Storytelling is the oldest teaching method. It has been transmitted to new civilization through tales from generation to generation. It has conveyed cultural values to the new owner. It represents a bridge that blends the new and the old. As a language teaching method, storytelling is assumed to promote other skills such as listening and speaking. Since the teacher supplies a comfortable atmosphere during storytelling, there is a great possibility to catch students' interests around the story and have them focus on the new items of the language. As a next step, students can bring about new products because of the activation of the imagination. In addition to no imagination constraints, students hear new forms of the language and try to remember and operate the new items of the language with their peers. It offers an integration of the new information with what the students have learned. Eventually, they can smoothly gain the target language as a result of drilling and an effective motivation tool to maintain language acquisition.

Recently, storytelling is regarded as one of the most significant way to teach English to EFL students. Stories are estimated to supply intelligible input that facilitates language learning (Fitzgibbon & Wilhelm, 1998). Cooper (1993) points out that storytelling is an ideal method used by educators to draw children's attention to the story with enjoyment.

Wright (1997) points out some reasons such as motivation, meaning, fluency, language awareness, communication, etc. that why stories should be regarded as one of the most crucial medium in teaching a

foreign language to children. Unlike native speakers, the most significant ability is to be able to follow and perceive the flow of the foreign language because non-native speakers are not familiar with the vocabulary or the structure of the target language. In order to acquire listening and reading comprehension, a teacher should persuade students that not everything in the story can be understood so he/she has to assist them to build up for predicting and guessing. If students are encouraged, they release their fears and begin to understand and make connections between the events in the story. They can sequence the events, expand their point of views and develop their social intelligence competence. Then they are able to use the target language meaningfully in different context. Thus, they can be more generative with speaking fluency and accuracy. Stories also stimulate the students to increase awareness to get the language items and sentence constructions even if they do not have ability to use them properly. Furthermore, storytelling promotes the students how to listen, how to talk, how to respond, that is how to communicate in a community.

### **3. Advantages of Storytelling in EFL Classes**

Storytelling has many advantages for social and emotional development. The storyteller and the listener construct a strong, relaxed and happy relationship during a story time. Storytelling encourages the learners to continue studying the language because it affects students positively when considering its motivating role in foreign language teaching. It also offers students to work out their imagination by getting involved into the stories or identifying themselves as one of the character in the story.

Teachers use stories as introduction for listening or writing comprehension tasks. After telling the story to students, they are asked to retell the story to their peers that help them to progress their speaking ability, empower their memory while recalling the details and making reasonable connections between the events, and also contribute to notice the use of proper structures (Fitzgibbon & Wilhelm, 1998).

In storytelling classes, students share social experience and recognize different perspectives. Especially young learners do not get bored to listen to a story more than once. This repetition causes them to acquire language items unconsciously. Moreover they desire to participate in the narrative. Teachers find an opportunity to introduce or review the new vocabulary or sentence structures in more varied, memorable and familiar context (Dujmovic, 2006). Therefore, it's possible to say storytelling appeals the students into a meaningful, interactive communication context, creates a cozy atmosphere and prepares them to learn the target language naturally.

In order to build up reading competency, students significantly need to get enough auditory and spoken language ability. Storytelling supplies crucial auditory input during social narrative communication. Some researches show that storytelling develops vocabulary learning and the teachers should visualize, and have attempts to influence the learners to listen to the story (Huang, 2006).

Storytelling may be assumed as a vital element to present the grammatical and syntactic features in interesting and meaningful context. Teachers may draw the learners' focus on the linguistic features and different tenses of the language (Huang, 2006). So the students first recognize the varied types of the structures and they may contextualize what they have gained through storytelling class.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is assumed that storytelling method is one of the vital medium to teach the intended language item in EFL classes that enriches the educators' teaching styles and brings about ample varied classroom activities. Since the learners blend their true life experiences with the stories told in the classroom they can easily involve in the learning process and they can reveal fruitful language production. This will enable them to recall better what they have learned in the classroom. Besides, learners will be able to acquire how to organize the events in their true lives.

Stories provide a rich and meaningful vocabulary context for the learners, so they can internalize the vocabulary in the stories in a shorter time because they usually personalize the characters in the stories and they recall the phrases and structures. As the learners activate their imagination during storytelling, stories offer them different patterns and thus they may be more productive in drilling. In addition, most of the stories carry a moral message that promotes the students to build up strong personalities.

Overall, EFL students need to be supported much more to make a notable progress in their language learning while studying with authentic materials. Therefore, the teacher applies storytelling method in his/her modern language classroom to facilitate and accelerate the learning process although it requires extra loads for preparation before the course (Huang, 2006).

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