

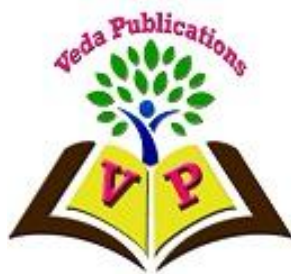


LEVERAGING THE POWER OF STORY TELLING FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING-LEARNING

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ABSTRACT



Children naturally enjoy narrating stories as well as listening to them. This paper aims to explore how an English language teacher can leverage the power of storytelling to help ESL learners acquire language. Storytelling is used to enhance language experience at two levels: one, when the teacher narrates, reads aloud or enacts the story and two, when the learner is encouraged to create mental imagery and weave a story of his own. In both instances, storytelling acts as the agency that helps children 'internalise' the patterns of language without much endeavour.

Keywords: *Children, Storytelling, English language, teaching, learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

Narrating stories and listening to them are an integral part of every childhood. This paper underscores the importance of storytelling as a pedagogical tool for English language teaching and learning. Storytelling is common to all societies as it forms the foundation for the continuation of all oral traditions and histories, be they of a nation or of a culture. This paper argues that storytelling, when used as a pedagogical tool, can enhance the teaching-learning process of English as a second language. As extensive opportunities to hear and speak in the language are provided for the learner, it makes them more articulate and develops all the LSRW skills in the process.

DEFINITION

All human beings are storytellers in one sense or another. Stories form our identity and a lot can be understood about a person from the stories that they share. We tell stories about our childhood, our friends and family, our relationships, our day-to-day happenings etc. Roney (1996) defines Storytelling as:

... a process where a person (the teller), using vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery, communicates with the audience who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily through body language and facial expression in an on-going communication



cycle. Storytelling is co-creative and interactive. It is one of the most powerful forms of art/communication known to humans and this explains why it possesses such great potential as a teaching-learning tool (7).

Hence an attempt is made to assess the impact of storytelling on the teaching and learning of English in the ESL context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several studies that have underscored the importance of stories and storytelling for teaching-learning. Sundmark (2014) and Remi (2011) endorse storytelling as a methodology in schools for language development. Sara Miller and Lisa Pennycuff (2008) recommend storytelling as a pedagogical strategy to be integrated into school curriculum to “increase students’ competencies” in the areas of reading and writing. There are also others who recommend storytelling as a pedagogical tool. Smith (1990) believes that we learn in the form of stories; the human brain is a story-seeking, story-creating instrument. Chenfield (2002) stresses the importance of stories as they fit all ages, places, timeframes, and circumstances. Storytelling is also known to improve self-awareness, visual imagery, and cultural knowledge (Mello 2001).

Considering the impact of storyreading and storytelling on language proficiency, the latter is chosen by a group that conducted a study to highlight its importance. Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004), studied the impact of both storytelling and storyreading on language comprehension and development. They concluded that storytelling was more effective compared to storyreading as storytellers use more repetition, sounds, and gestures when compared to a narrator reading a story. This activity kept the learners engaged and also helped develop their listening skills.

The storytelling methodology is also endorsed by researchers Cliatt and Shaw (1988). They argue that storytelling helps learners enhance their use of language and logical skills and develops positive attitudes towards instruction. Other researchers believe that storytelling can be used as an effective means to increase early literacy and

promote reading comprehension skills (Haven & Ducey, 2007).

SELECTING STORYBOOKS

Selecting good storybooks for narration is crucial if the teacher wants to meet the twofold objective of effective language teaching and learning. A good book not only holds the interest of the learners but also motivates them to listen and read more.

Some pointers that may help in selecting good books for storytelling are as follows. It is important to choose books that are age-appropriate. Books that are multicultural in nature, that have gained an international reputation and that are informative and contribute to general knowledge, are rich in culture and contain authentic examples of English, may prove to be effective. Narratives that contribute to vocabulary acquisition and the correct usage of English language structures and expressions may be selected.

It would be advantageous to have books that have rich illustrations that synchronise with the narrative text. All these factors help in implementing a story-based methodology, thereby contributing to the learners’ development of English language competence.

STORYTELLING AS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD

This paper suggests that storytelling is an effective method to promote English language learning as it helps break the monotony of a conventional teaching methodology. It also does not require the conventional classroom space to practise language, as this activity can be carried out reasonably anywhere, even outdoors.

The storytelling method allows for interruptions in narration in order for the learners to understand a new vocabulary item or a sentence structure. This may require the teacher to keep the meanings of the textual words handy in case any learner asks for it. Questioning can also be encouraged to make sure that the listeners are making sense of the story. The teacher should also be able to pronounce the words correctly so that the children can pick up the same.

When the learners are given opportunities to practice what they have been listening to, the benefit is theirs. While narrating the story, the



attention of the learner is not so much on the technicalities of producing the language but on storytelling. This helps the learners overcome their fear of failure and embarrassment at producing the language. Since they are not conscious of the production of the language, they are relaxed and the unconscious structure of the language (whatever has been internalised) comes to the fore, making language production seem effortless. Although the production of language may not be accurate, the learner at least derives satisfaction from the fact that he has tried.

CHILDREN AS STORYTELLERS

Children not only love listening to stories but also love narrating them. Imagination is so rich in them that the impossible and the improbable become real in their story world. It requires effort on the part of the narrator to convert mental imagery and thought structure into oral language. From the point of view of language development, a child while narrating a story may not be as conscious of the language generation process as she may be in other situations where appropriate language production is important. Hence, encouraging children to be storytellers helps develop not only their self-confidence and language skills but also their ability to articulate.

Making learners become storytellers acts as a two-way process. They not only hear the language, its enunciation, structure and grammar but also try to construct it themselves, thereby reinforcing language acquisition.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The strategy of using storytelling allows the teacher to experiment with other resources to make it a fulfilling activity. Voice modulation, intonation, facial expressions body language etc., can be used by the storyteller to bring the narrative alive for the listeners.

Storytelling is a very interactive method and may require teachers to undergo training in the art of storytelling, its techniques and other details in order to be good storytellers. It also requires a lot of patience and dedication on the part of the teacher to make her storytelling classes successful, as a lot of

energy, planning and creativity are required to sustain the attention of the learners.

Using the storytelling methodology in classrooms requires the teacher to have excellent classroom management skills, because it is easy to lose control over the class when a lot of discussion and excitement is generated. The teacher should also be able to synchronise and link the reading material to other areas in the curriculum so that the children get the maximum benefit. Initially, the teacher may find it cumbersome to shift from the traditional method of teaching. However, over a period of time, the new method will become natural and spontaneous.

Teachers can use stories to supplement their core materials or the existing textbook, if they are not comfortable using it as a primary source. They can also be used as the starting point and as a rich context for developing a wide variety of related language and learning activities, which involve children personally, creatively and actively in a whole curriculum approach (Ellis and Brewster 1991 and 2002).

DISADVANTAGES OF THE STORYTELLING METHOD

In a class where the number of students is more, 'happy noise' may be a factor that has to be dealt with. Commotion due to interaction among students in the class may affect the concentration level of some students and thereby affect language teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

There is tremendous educational value in using storytelling as a strategy for English language teaching and learning. Using storytelling consciously as a methodology within the framework of the curriculum offers positive results. When the learners become storytellers, they acquire confidence and overcome the inhibition of using the English language. They also become articulate. As they continually listen to the English language in the form of stories and practise speaking, one activity reinforces the other in English language acquisition and generation. With continuous repetition of words and sounds, the learners acquire language skills



almost effortlessly and also develop a positive attitude towards it.

The teacher can use the storytelling methodology judiciously, as a supplement for language teaching-learning, if not as the main strategy. In this manner, storytelling contributes to develop and 'internalise' the patterns and grammar of the English language without much endeavour.

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APPENDIX

There are several resources available online for reading stories aloud. Audio recordings of several classic short stories in the English language are available at www.learnoutloud.com and contemporary short stories are found at Comma Press. Several other sites offer short stories, including www.justbooksreadaloud.com, www.storylineonline.net, www.scholastic.com/100BestReadAloudBooks