

THE MAGIC WORLD OF STORYTELLING: SOME POINTS FOR REFLECTION

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There are many ways to get students involved in the English learning process. Telling stories is one of the most effective ones. This article attempts to gather some pedagogical and psychological reasons why this kind of activity is important, not only to improve students vocabulary and make them achieve a feeling of self confidence but to let them develop social values.

Introduction

English language teaching methodologies used in our schools often focus on understanding grammatical structures as well as on translating texts. They do not necessarily view communication as an essential part to effectively learn a second language. Brumfit and Johnson (1979) were some of the first linguists to draw our attention towards five main communicative functions: 1. Personal (the individual inner thoughts); 2. Interpersonal Communication (social relationships); 3. Directive (for persuading, convincing, suggesting); 4. Referential (to talk about the past); 5. Imaginative (the creative use of language). These aspects have had a great impact on current teaching practices as learning a language is seen not only as the acquisition of formal aspects, but also as the capacity to use them according to sociocultural variables.

Other important works like the ones by Fillmore et al. (1979) and the Colombian National Curricular Guidelines for Foreign

Languages (1999) point out that we should be aware of three types of processes students need to experience in the English classroom: the social, the linguistic and the cognitive processes. In order to effectively activate these processes we also have to take into consideration individual differences in second language acquisition, for example: older learners vs. younger learners, social opportunities, and motivation, among others. Having those ideas in mind, we can think of storytelling as a tool to ensure students engage in the said processes.

Why use stories in class?



There are many reasons that justify the use of stories in class. First of all, they allow us to work with emotional and social aspects and this is something that helps us to maintain our traditional and cultural background. It is well-known that people have told stories as part of their tradition and with the purpose of transmitting and passing on their knowledge to the new generations. This has happened since the beginning of spoken language and in every civilization. Many of these stories have been passed on from country to country over thousands of years. The storytelling

tradition is one of the richest possessions of any culture and both children and adults love to hear the same story over and over again and learn to remember every detail. Nowadays, it is possible to find some of these stories in books; but, the telling of short stories orally gives the readers a breath of life that printed word cannot.

Another reason why teachers should tell stories to their classes, and encourage children to tell the ones they know is that traditional stories introduce children to the main features and beliefs of their national culture. They give them an inheritance from the past, and thus a sense of history.

Telling stories exercises the imagination (Ellis and Brewster: 1991). Children try to visualize what they hear to imagine what people, animals or spirits look like and how they sound. This imaginative experience helps to develop their own creative powers. Listening to stories develops children's listening and concentration skills and their ability to receive and understand information expressed in words. Also, stories expose children to new vocabulary and sentence structure which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their own conversation.

As mentioned above, children enjoy hearing stories over and over again and learn to predict what is coming next in the story. Following meaning and predicting language are important skills in the development of reading. Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience. Reading and writing are often individual activities, done alongside others but completed alone. A shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement, etc. is not only enjoyable but important for social and emotional development.

It is well known that most of the stories have a moral about human attitudes and behaviour. Through listening and talking about these children begin to develop a sense of what is right and wrong and learn to appreciate other people's feelings. According to Ellis and Brewster (ibid.), storytelling can enhance work in every subject area and on any topic. Religions are also rich in stories which can be enjoyed by everyone. Sharing these encourages children to respect other people's beliefs and traditions. It is not necessary to restrict student- teacher to traditional tales because it is possible to make up stories about anything. Young children particularly enjoy stories related to aspects of their own experience, for example, about the area in which they live, the animals they are familiar with and so on. Through listening to such stories they will learn to think imaginatively and to create their own adventure to tell.

Conclusion

The main objective of telling stories is to build the students' confidence and develop in them a positive attitude towards English. Storytelling is an authentic resource to be introduced because it gives students the opportunity to participate actively in the learning process. Some teachers think that this learning process has to deal only with young learners but people from all ages love to hear and tell stories. We as a teachers have to realize that children do not lose their enjoyment of stories when they get older. This necessity becomes more intense. Why? Because they are part of our lives and they make them more interesting. By using stories we can have a way that will help us to give children a tool to achieve their success in school and in life.

References

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