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Exploring and Exploiting Stories in the Primary ESL Classroom

Theatrical Storytelling, Using Puppets, and
Children as Authors and Storytellers.

Session 2

Contents

Introduction	2
Objectives	2
Materials	2
Timetable	2
Procedures	3
Session 2a: Using Puppets in Storytelling	3
1. The purpose of puppets	3
2. The Puppet Theatre	4
3. Puppet Abilities.....	4
Session 2b: Children as Authors and Storytellers.....	6
Preparing Children to be Authors.....	6
Children as Storytellers.....	7
1. Story Sequence	7
Activity	7
2. Character Map.....	8
Activity	8
3. Paired Storytelling	9
Activity	9
4. Character Voices.....	9
Activity – count to 10	9
5. Circle Stories.....	9
Activity – circle story.....	10
6. Faces	10
Activity – Pass the Face	10
7. Actions and Gestures	10
Activity – Catch It.....	10
8. Walk the Walk	11
Activity - walking.....	11
Voice Projection	11
Eye Contact	12
Pauses	12
The Story Chair	12

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Introduction

Over four hours (2 X 2-hour sessions) participants have the opportunity to explore the strategies of theatrical storytelling, creating and using puppets for storytelling, and assisting children to be authors and storytellers. This is the second 2-hour session, after participants have completed the home project and created a set of puppets.

Objectives

Participants have:

- Learnt and practiced specific strategies for theatrical storytelling
- Explored ideas for creating and using puppets for storytelling

Now participants will:

- Create and use simple puppets
- Explore strategies for encouraging children as authors and storytellers.

Materials

Facilitator needs:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Sample puppets
- Sample stories to tell

Participants need:

- Participant's notes and worksheets
- Writing materials
- Scrap Materials for creating puppets projects (at home in own time)

Timetable

1. Theatrical storytelling (90 mins) *(completed)*

2. Creating Puppets (30 mins) *(completed)*

PROJECT – create a set of puppets (own time) *(should be completed)*

3. Using Puppets in Storytelling (60 mins)

4. Children as authors and storytellers (60 mins)

Procedures

There are a number of basic theatrical tools we can use to infuse drama into our storytelling for Primary school children learning ESL.

It is especially important to add interest to stories for young ESL students because they probably won't know or understand all of the words used, especially the first time they hear the story, but they will enjoy it and be motivated to listen (and watch) again and again, learning new words and expressions every time.

Session 2a: Using Puppets in Storytelling

Participants should come prepared with a set of puppets (of any type) designed with a particular story in mind.

1. The purpose of puppets

It's useful to bear in mind the reason why puppets are being used.

a. For fun

Anything new or different adds interest and motivation, increasing the engagement of the students and therefore improving their language learning.

b. As a prop

When the teacher uses puppets in the telling of a story to the class they are essentially being used as a prop to assist, for example, in differentiating characters.

c. As a craft activity

The children can participate in creating puppets for storytelling. Craft activities improve motor skills (which will impact on 'penmanship') and thinking skills (problem-solving), increase engagement in the story (language arts), activate social skills as they cooperate in group work, and provide opportunities for conversation and interaction using target language (listening and speaking and implicit grammar).

d. Face the fear

It is normal and acceptable to feel shy or fearful when presenting a story in front of a group of peers or students. Using puppets helps to shift the focus of the audience enabling even shy students to present more boldly than usual. Using puppets can give greater confidence to the young teacher presenting a story, as well as to children involved in their own storytelling.

2. The Puppet Theatre

Puppet theatres are over-rated. They are generally big and clunky and having several operators of puppets crammed in behind one can lead to total chaos (and disappointment by the players). In the Malaysian classroom situation where the teacher moves from room to room, you would either have to carry your theatre with you, or create one for each and every room where you wish to teach with your puppets.

The fact is that children are generally imaginative enough to focus on the puppets and see the story happening without needing to have everything else 'blocked out' by a theatre. When the teacher is telling stories and handling the puppets, it's good for the students to be looking at him/her as well as the puppets anyway.

If required, a simple barrier can be erected – such as a desk lying on its side – for children to duck down behind when they are presenting with puppets, but several points need to be kept in mind:

- Safety – anything that can go wrong will go wrong! Children will bump and push and things will fall over, so if there is any possibility of something falling on someone ... don't do it!
- Muffled voices – if the children holding the puppets also have a speaking part and they are down behind a barrier their voices will be muffled.
- Space – several children behind the barrier will likely get entangled as they move around.
- Pride in the presentation – it may be beneficial for the puppet operators to see their audience and be aware of the enjoyment of their presentation.

3. Puppet Abilities

Participants were advised when planning the creation of their puppets to consider the movements required by their puppet characters in the story. Some puppets can only bounce and wiggle, others can 'talk'.

a. Finger puppets

These are very small and can only "bounce and wiggle". They work best in a story that involves mostly ***narration***.

Their involvement in the story will mostly involve placement. The operator can use voices and make them bounce a little as they talk to each other. The audience needs to be close enough to have a clear idea of what is happening.

They can also be quickly removed and replaced, so for the individual storyteller (teacher), a whole story with a lot of different characters can be enacted.

Children can operate them easily, with one child having a number of fingers engaged, or a group of children holding the puppet characters while a child or the teacher narrates the story.

b. Stick puppets

The same applies here as for finger puppets. Essentially the puppet is larger and presented on a stick (pop-stick, wooden spoon etc.), but it bounces and wiggles the same as a finger puppet. The operator can only handle two at a time (one in each hand) rather than up to 10, but they are easily put down and retrieved in the telling of a story.

These puppets are great for a story involving **narration**, but voices can be used appropriately.

c. Glove puppets

These puppets can bounce and wiggle and also wave their little arms. The operator can handle two at a time, but it is awkward to put them down and retrieve them quickly. They require a certain amount of dexterity that small children with very stubby fingers may find awkward.

There are a great many glove puppet varieties available commercially – usually of animal characters, and of course these can also be used when they fit our stories.

Again, these puppets are great for a story involving **narration**, but they can also do **actions** with their arms.

d. Sock Puppets, Folded Paper (mouth) Puppets

These puppets can “talk”, and the operator needs to practise opening and closing the mouth appropriately rather than just randomly. Proper use can be very effective in encouraging children to practise saying target language along with the puppet.

This can be more difficult for young children to manage well, but they can certainly have a lot of fun trying. The story narration is not so vital here, the use of this puppet is all about **dialogue**, and possibly some **actions** (‘biting’ and nudging – as the puppet has no limbs).

e. Marionettes or String Puppets and Shadow Puppets

The simpler versions of these puppets have **actions** and movement but generally cannot “talk”. They are complicated to make and difficult to manage (for children).

Presentations of Prepared Puppets

Each pair present their puppets – demonstrate the puppets but only a sample (they were not asked to prepare the whole story at this stage.)

Session 2b: Children as Authors and Storytellers



What do children really want? What is it that engages them, makes them want to pay attention and try their hardest in their schoolwork? Maybe they're not even aware what it is that they want ...

Relationships! They want attention. They want to be “the one!” They want to know that you are talking to them, giving attention to them. They want to be involved, have a go, and have fun – as long as they can feel safe.

So how do you give that to all of the children in the class at the same time?

Go on! Have a guess! (Tell stories!) Children love stories. They love being told stories – stories read aloud to them and (even better) stories told aloud.

So making up stories comes fairly naturally to children.

Children are already creating stories in their heads.

The problem arises with:

- Language – having sufficient vocab and language structure to tell the story in an understandable form.
- Thinking skills and problem-solving ability to logically sequence the story in telling it.
- Limited writing skills to produce their story in written form.
- Shyness/fear about speaking aloud in front of others.
- Insufficient suitable practice time because of listeners (especially adults) getting bored with them and telling them to be quiet and/or to stop ‘lying’.

An “author” is the ‘originator or creator’ of a story or idea. We tend to use the word ‘author’ to describe one who writes a story, and this can present as a huge problem in the area of “Children as Authors”.

Preparing Children to be Authors

To encourage and assist children to overcome the above situations to become authors we can:

- Read **and** tell lots of stories to them – yes, in English!
- Encourage them to respond to stories in a variety of ways so that they can visualize and experience the story, and to improve their language, sequencing, social awareness (listening and allowing others to listen):
 - Create art work related to the story – including creating puppets to show particular characters.
 - Dramatize all or part of the story
 - Join in with rhymes and chants in the story
 - Suggest variations or different endings to the story
 - Retell the story
 - Use puppets in the dramatization and/or telling of the story

- Stimulate their imagination with ideas and suggestions.
- Notice the worthwhile parts of stories created by them (rather than picking up on errors) and provide encouragement and genuine constructive criticism.
- Firstly teach them to be storytellers and avoid the difficulties involved in writing. Their stories can be recorded in video form and they can create pictures to show their story sequence. Once they have the story well established and organised, then they can work on the written form.



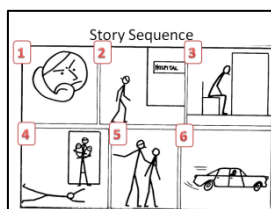
Children as Storytellers

"Giving children the opportunity to tell and also hear stories, encourages them to develop active speaking and listening skills." (Mynard, 2005)

We are going to work on some activities that are designed to help children develop their storytelling skills. Participating will both assist trainee teachers to improve their own storytelling skills, and provide them with strategies to use in the classroom.

Some of the ideas for these activities were taken from "Storytelling!" (Codell, 2012), "Storytelling in the Early Years" (Mynard, 2005), "Teacher's Guide: Teaching Storytelling" (Storytelling Arts of Indiana, 2012), and "Early Years Starter Pack" (Ferguson, 2007). These are all available on the Internet, and are listed in the Bibliography. (Go look them up!)

1. Story Sequence



Firstly the student storytellers need to know the story sequence really well. We don't want to necessarily memorise the story, but we need to remember what happened in exactly the right order. It sounds really simple, but for children this is a very important skill.

Activity

On index cards, draw simple pictures (stick figures) to indicate the stages of your story. Lay them out in order like a "Story Map".

- Do not write words!
- Do not write numbers!

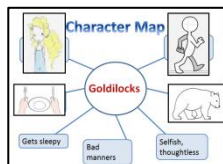


You should have about 6 pictures. If you have more than 10 then either your story is too long, or you are being too detailed about the stages of your story.

- The first time you do this activity with the children, they could do it about a story they have already heard and know – so essentially this is a **retell** activity.

NOW take your 6-10 cards in a stack and throw them up into the air! Gather them together, and see if you can rearrange them into the correct order. You can do this several times for practice.

2. Character Map



A good storyteller needs to know the story characters (good and bad) and be able to talk about the freely as if they were friends.

Activity

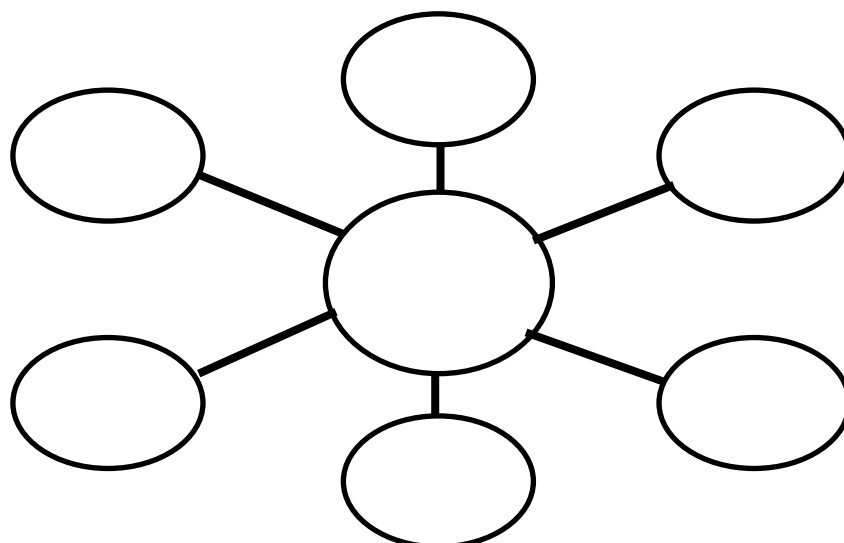
Draw a character map for each of your characters.

Start with a circle with the name of the character. Add lines, and put a characteristic or trait at the end of each line.

- When young children are doing this, we are trying to get away from the hassle of writing and spelling at this stage, so it could all be done with pictures.

Participant's Notes – worksheet page.

Character Map



3. Paired Storytelling



Children (and IPG students) should practise their storytelling with a partner first.

This does not necessarily mean that one tells and the other listens – that can come at a later stage. At this stage we just want them to tell the story together with each other, not strictly “taking turns”, but both adding parts of the story as they go along.

Activity

Sit down with your puppet-making partner, and tell your story together in this way.

4. Character Voices



This is an easy activity to help you students practise using different character voices – without having to think of the words to say.

Activity – count to 10

1. Working with your partner, take it in turns to try saying the numbers 1 to 10 in each of these different styles.
2. As an angry parent – telling a child to obey right now.
3. As a young child learning to count – maybe making mistakes and repeating and correcting.
4. It's your party and you have a disappointing number of presents, count them.
5. You are the referee in a boxing match. One man is down, count him out.
6. It is a bad phone connection and you are trying to give someone your phone number (which is 1234 5678 9 10)
7. You are counting your coins that you have been saving up in your money-box.

Can you think of any others - ?

5. Circle Stories



'Circle time' is a great opportunity to share stories and snippets of stories in a non-threatening environment. There are a great many storytelling type games you can play such as “The Emperor's Cat” where each child repeats what the previous one says and adds a line.

Activity – circle story

Choose a story the students know (because you have told them) and divide it into 6-10 parts.

Students sit in a circle, and each in turn around the circle tells one part of the story. After the last part of the story, the next student starts the story again.

- If the class is very big, there could be several smaller circles – but it is better if everyone gets to listen to everyone else.

6. Faces



This is another circle activity but this time students practise the storytelling art of showing a face.

Activity – Pass the Face

Students sit in a circle.

1. The teacher makes a face at the first student. The student copies the face, and turns to show it to everyone in the circle.
2. The student then makes a different face at the second student.
3. The second student then copies the expression and shows everyone.
4. The second student then chooses a different facial expression to show to the third student.

7. Actions and Gestures



This is another circle activity for students to practice using actions and gestures.

Activity – Catch It

Students stand in a circle.

The first student (or the teacher) looks as something imaginary in their hands - a spider; a cold, wet, slimy fish; a china teapot; a feather; a dinosaur; a balloon etc

They call out another student's name across the circle, and what it is that they are throwing and call "Catch it!"

For example: "Faris! An egg! Catch it!"

The catcher then thinks of a different object and throws it to someone else.

8. Walk the Walk



Children can have a lot of fun practicing walking in different conditions. This encourages them to visualize the situation, and can become an enjoyable part of a storytelling.

Activity - walking

Students have turns at demonstrating walking in different ways:

- walking home from school knowing there are tons of chores waiting
- through heavy sand;
- barefoot from a very sticky and squishy swamp;
- through a blistering hot desert;
- through a scary place at midnight;
- with your right foot in a cast;
- through honey.

any other ideas?

Storytelling Skills

Children also need to learn these storytelling skills to gain confidence in storytelling and listening and speaking generally.

Voice Projection



Sometimes listening to children at play, it seems like they already know all about voice projection! However children and adults alike need practice to control their voices.

Children can enjoy and benefit from activities such as these ideas from the article "Storytelling!" (Codell, 2012):

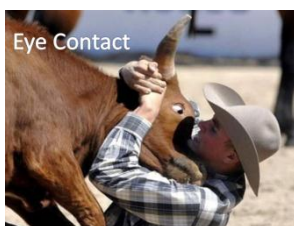
Teach children to get loud! Ask children to turn to their neighbour and say 'hi' or 'hello' in the way that they normally do. Ask them to put their hands on their throats when they say it. Do they feel anything? Ask them to put their hands right over their rib cage and say "hello." Do they feel anything?

Have children lie on the floor with a book on their diaphragm. The books will rise and fall slowly as they breathe. Tell them to feel the movements of their diaphragm.

Have children keep their hand over the diaphragm and breathe in and out more markedly. Have children say "hi" when exhaling. Then let the children say "hi" like they did in the beginning. With hands on diaphragms and throats let them feel the difference. Tell them with storytelling breathing, you want to use that energy and strength used in exhaling to carry your words. Practice saying words and sentences while exhaling. Make sure you take deep breaths in between the exercise.

This may seem like a goofy exercise, and will probably get a lot of giggles. But it is a very important first exercise, because it helps assure the children that they will be heard.

Eye Contact



Model eye contact while you are talking to your students.

Point out the eye contact you have modelled.

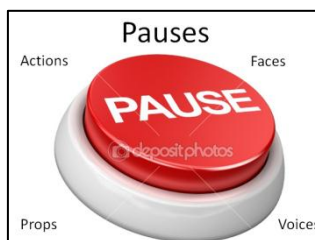
Just for fun, stare at each person in the room, have the children do the same.

Tell them they must try to make each listener feel as if the story is being told just for him or her, and eye contact helps the listeners feel that way.

If the storytellers-in-training are too shy for eye contact, they can look at the tops of people's heads.

Can you invent a fun circle game involving 'eye contact'?

Pauses



When we are nervous it's easy to be in a hurry to get through telling a story before we forget it.

Children also need to learn not to hurry, and to know the right moments to pause.

These are good opportunities to make good use of actions, props, facial gestures and special voices.

Can you invent a fun circle game involving 'pauses'?

The Story Chair



Some teachers like to have a chair in the classroom designated as the "story chair" – as soon as the teacher sits there the excitement and anticipation mounts and the children prepare to listen.

Children telling stories can also be rewarded with the honour of sitting in the story chair.

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