

Chapter IV: Storytelling

Introduction

There are many reasons why is it so important to tell stories in our classes. Stories or storytelling is a practical and powerful teaching tool, especially for language learning since it provides students with opportunities to listen to language in its context and introduce new vocabulary ... Equally important, stories can have a deep impact on student oral performance (listening and speaking) and this is the concern of the forgoing chapter.

This chapter shed lights on identifying the significance of classroom storytelling and its relationship with the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. It describes reasons for using stories in classroom and it describes the storytelling process and demonstrates storytelling classroom activities.

A.IV.1.Storytelling

"We all need stories for our minds as we need food for our bodies: we watch television, go to the cinema and theatre, read, and exchange stories with our friends. Stories are particularly important in the lives of our children: stories help children to understand their world and to share it with others. Student's hunger for stories is constant. Every time they enter your classroom they enter with a need for stories."

(Wright, 1995 quoted in Miskiewicz, 2004)

Storytelling is described to be the original form of teaching and there are still societies in which it is the only form of teaching **(Pedersen, M, 1995)**.

Generally speaking, storytelling is relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gestures; it differs from reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory or acting out a drama through it shares characteristics with these arts .

It is the oral interpretation of a personal, literary or traditional story during which the storyteller invites the listeners to create meaning by an active participation through conversation and imagination. Through the storyteller's voice, gestures and facial expressions, the listener sees and creates a series of mental images derived from meaning associated with words, gestures and sounds.

Telling a story can be profound, exercising the thinking and touching the emotions of both teller and listener

A.IV.2.Stories and history teaching

Oral storytelling is originated in the oral tradition. People have told stories as long as they have had languages for communication and entertainments, then stories have been handed down from one generation to another. It was the medium through which people learned their history, settled their arguments, and come to make sense of their world. Then comes the written world with its mysterious symbols where at a while only rich people have the chance to use. After that, the written process has expanded to include even ordinary persons through books, pamphlets, and countless of written kinds and it was the golden era for written.

After, people carry on telling stories in casual way, bed time, dinner tables, camp fires... in this time introducing this art in learning was almost forgotten. Through time with the help and contributions of many persons who valves the oral tale and kept storytelling alive.

School children with their good memorization and remembering to the historical events their teachers had presented for them in the form of stories had proved the efficiency of this oral art in recalling any fact in the process of learning.

Children had realized that through these stories they made pictures in their minds, and they kept making pictures even they read a story silently from the one realized by teachers . Storytelling has a good impact on student learners process and it was adapted in teaching, later it has been in the process of vanishing from the curriculum since the process of learning generally depends on the scientific approach, and storytelling contradicts the ideal of these scientificness, students were either to memorize facts or to imitate the scientific methodology.

In 1980, however the storytelling aspect of history teaching is in the focus once again and today the art of storytelling lives in our classrooms mainly because of its quality with regard to motivation and identity. Students became listeners to stories before they learn to read. It is a means of personal communication in the foreign language classroom

(Miskiewicz, 2004).

A.IV.3.Storytelling in a foreign language classroom

Classrooms are considered to be devoted for students engagement formally or semi formally with the hope to engage in the process of learning. Such kind of engagement should be social and this is the concern of storytelling in EFL classrooms. This social relationship involved in storytelling lies in group works and the interaction between students when dealing with storytelling activities to meet the emotional cognitive and psychological demands

(Miskiewicz, 2004).

As a learning tool, storytelling main focus in EFL classroom is specifically speaking in an oral session is to remind students that listening is important, their spoken words are powerful and that communication as well as interaction between them is an art. It is a practical powerful teaching tool in the fact that it initiates students to discuss about the target culture, it

offers them full opportunities to engage in a reading or listening tasks through their interaction with story and teller and their discussion when dealing with storytelling activities.

While sharing a story with FL students, the teacher invites his learners to be aware of the thinking process through questioning, pausing, sharing of ideas. He relies on student's background knowledge to participate and comprehend when selecting stories in his classroom, such as asking them to visualize and imagine the setting or events, predict what might happen, and relate characters or events to their own lives and to comprehend the cultural aspects involved under the treated story. So, it depends on learners to use what they already know to comprehend new information

(Delett, 2001).

Despite the importance of stories in foreign language classrooms, teachers of languages hesitate to incorporate storytelling in their classes as well as language instruction .They complain of an overloaded curriculum, as they report additional problems such as having little prior experience with integrating storytelling into language teaching, locating appropriate stories and lacking the cultural and language abilities to handle storytelling in English. (Delett, 2001)

As a result , storytelling in EFL classrooms are partly neglected by teachers due to their mentioned obstacles .In order to overcome these later , storytelling must be given more importance by both teachers and learners .So , to be implemented in the different teaching instructions .Stories have to be selected taking into account learners ' need and interest and should be used as a main part of the other modules rather than the Oral Expression course like literature ...

A.IV.4.The role of stories in a foreign language classroom

Stories play a significant role in the acquisition of a foreign language as in the mother tongue .Stories are everywhere , every day we listen to stories , we tell stories and we think out of stories. Stories give individuals full chances to express their values , fears , hopes , and dreams .

"Oral stories direct the expression of a literary and cultural heritage; and through them that heritage is appreciated, understood and kept alive" (Pederson, 1995, 1).

In EFL classrooms, introducing students to stories in the target language means to open for them horizons to the full range of language which is so important for the success in the

target language .Stories provide learners with a natural context for learning which they are familiar with. So , they tend to use their complete involvement to relate aspects of their own personal life , experiences with those of the story to understand it.(Miskiewicz, 2004).

An important role of stories in classroom is authenticity, as it contributes in creating motivation and helps students to forget the notion of "a boring English lesson" .Stories in classroom is the door of a magic world full of wonders and dreams which let students fully absorbed by the narrative and they don't get bored even if they find difficulties in understanding.

" Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness , sense of wonder, of mystery , of reverence of life .This nurturing of the spirit comes first , it is the primary purpose of storytelling ,and all the other uses and effects are secondary "

(Pederson, 1995,12).

Teachers choose to tell stories in classroom because when telling a story , the session is a time to share feelings and to create a relaxed and a happy relationship between teacher and students characterized by a mutual confidence and the product will be a creation of a shared human experience based on words and imagination.

Oral stories to a large extent develop students' listening skills , it provides them with opportunities to listen to the language in context .It is considered to be a perfect source of language experience expressed through words .

" No wonder, they are highly motivating and fairly cheap functional classroom tool".(Miskiewicz, 2004, 6).

Through this oral technique , learners will gain knowledge of the lesson and simultaneously improve their listening abilities, their public speaking, articulation, vocabulary, grammar, self confidence and imagination.

A.IV.5.Reasons for using stories

Stories in EFL classroom can serve many functions " including sparking students interest aiding the flow of lectures, making material memorable, overcoming students resistance or anxiety and building rapport between the instructor and the students, or among students themselves".

(Green M, 2004,69)

So, there are many reasons why we want to tell stories in our classes, the following are the main ones to consider for introducing storytelling while teaching a foreign language such as English.

A.IV.5.1.A source of motivation

Generally speaking , stories motivate students in the sense that the real context of the teaching / learning process implies strict pedagogical instructions to be followed by learners and adapted by teachers , a story with the amount of authenticity it contains gives students the great desire to deal with this art in their classes and to get rid of all those serious limitations .As it is noticed , learners of a foreign language express a positive reactions for listening or reading a story because they consider it a suitable alternative for improving their being and thinking .It helps them develop a positive attitudes towards both the foreign language as well as the process of learning itself and creates the desire to continue learning or encourages them to take risks in this process and even incorporate any topic into story form and made more memorable if the listener takes the story to heart .(Miskiewicz, 2004).

A.IV.5.2.Meaning

In learning a foreign language , meaning is among the main factors to look for by learners .This is the concern of stories in EFL classes. Unlike the other aspects of language ; with stories students find it easy to extract the meaning in order to understand the whole story, where they encounter both familiar and new language patterns .So , consequently we find them motivated to develop their abilities to understand even more in the other fields .On the other side , it brings meaning when tellers who become very familiar with even one tale by retelling it often, students learn that literature carries new meaning with each new encounter and push learners to negotiate the meaning of a tale each time .Stories present language in a context that is easy to understand.

A.IV.5.3.Communication

The act of telling a story implies what is called "collaboration" since Stories develop a sense of being and having an audience .So, in storytelling we have all the principle conditions necessary to realize a complete and a successful communication presenting the teller, the story, the listener or the audience through the oral medium, we construct a communication between teller and listener about a message or a content conveyed by a story. Of course the two parts of communication should be good language users.

In classroom context, to have a real communication , one condition must be realized which is "good language users ".Our learners are unlikely to be good users , so it depends on the teacher to create an environment suitable for that, stories contribute to establish that kind of context.

Storytelling in general is a mean of communication in every day life, managing its skills and understanding the basic story structures are two main concepts very important for, casual conversations, understanding literature and successful communication .

A.IV.5.4.Stimulus for speaking and writing

When listening to a story , students are asked to react or respond to it since they need to share their opinions of what they have listened to with others whether by speaking (discussing the different themes treated by the story , summarize it orally , retell it using students own words) or by writing (written summery, write another story which has the same themes, write an end of their own for the story...).(Miskiewicz, 2004).

A.IV.6.Stories and culture

Each culture has a unique set of beliefs and a unique stories that explain how the people in a certain culture view the world. So , stories are among the main representatives of the oral traditions;

"The unique identity of each culture is closely tied to its language .In all cultures, occupational and domestic skills, games , lore and moral and religious values are passed orally from generation to generation."

(Cadaval, 1996, 2)

Hence, stories are means to learn about the experiences , events and beliefs that transmit and form the world views of the cultural group and that tell them as well as disseminate the cultural information through their imaginations and skills .Stories are responsible to provide any cultural group with the spiritual and social knowledge which ensure them a sense of shared identity and purpose .

(Cadaval, 1996, 2).

Stories are a valuable cultural treasure .They do usually present culture since from the earliest times ,stories captures history , morality, faith and other critical and cultural aspects of society from one generation to another. They are claimed to represent our cultural heritage .Then storytelling has been a form of communication unique to every culture (Rouse, 2006).

The storytelling process in an EFL classroom is a suitable tool to help the learners to adjust to a new culture without disassociating themselves from their original culture .In other words, storytelling Through language and art help those students to maintain a sense of their own culture while learning about a new one, and storytelling activities are revealed to be an ideal teaching vehicles for this purpose .

Stories in classroom provide insights about the importance of the cultural narrative within the different cultural settings as they interpret the cultural aesthetics differences. Learners when tackling stories, they articulate and reflect upon personal and emotional experiences while learning English as they reflect their social-cultural values .Teachers need to understand students' values , interests and customs to expand their prior knowledge and skills ,but unfortunately, the FL teaching reality implies the fact that more importance is given to the written language , this lead to ignore or forget the power of the oral use of language in general and of telling stories in particular in the transmission of the cultural knowledge .

All in all , there exist many ways in the art of storytelling which can enhance students' intercultural understanding :

- It is an opportunity for FL learners to experience diverse cultures and being offered insights into different traditions and values.

- It empathize learners' with different unfamiliarity people (characters), places and situations as it helps them to consider new ideas .

- enables learners to explore their own cultural roots and reveal differences as well as commonalities of cultures around the world.(Tice,2006).

A.IV.7.Selection of stories

No one can deny how important the selection of stories is for the successful storytelling in EFL classes. In the first rank , it's the responsibility of the teacher as an instructor to make the good and the successful choice of stories ,since it was demonstrated that though different types of stories(legends , folktales , fairytales ...)are appealing and seem suitable but they may be inadequate for the teaching of foreign languages because of their complicated and sometimes archaic language .Primary , stories have to include natural language , simple story grammar or rhetorical structure to be predictable and facilitate comprehension, as they have to include chain structures , rhyming words repetition , action words ,sound words...ect.

The selection of the suitable story to be used in the classroom must be based on many criteria ;(Bohlen, 1993 stated in Fields, 1999) reports that

" it must be repetitive and have a high degree of visuals that relate to the text on each page " (65). These characteristics are relatively related to the fact of reading .For listening to a story, (Chase , 1986 reported in Fields,1999) added that it must be relatively short and contains concrete terms which should be visualized for the listener to facilitate understanding .She stressed the fact that the same story should include predictable lines , rhyme ,rhythm, logical sequence and to be supported by illustrations to enable the FL learners to follow the words , memorize, recognize words and decode the text.

In deciding about the criteria in choosing a story , scholars in the field of EFL teaching come to care about the interest level, vocabulary difficulty and the nature of topics , as they report five critical components to consider when selecting a story

- Time and setting.
- Characters with personality.
- A major problem.
- Attempts to solve this problem.
- A quick resolution .

Finally , in addition to all these characteristics ,teachers should measure the motivational and the authentic spirit of the story.

A.IV.8.Classroom storytelling stages

Storytelling technique as many others passes through three precise stages in which learners are going to internalize the important aspects of the story ; beginning and ending , setting, characters and plot lines .these stages are: pre-storytelling, presenting the story and post storytelling (activities and games)

A.IV.8.1. Before storytelling:

As it is mentioned before, the teacher should choose his story in accordance to the cited criteria (short story with a limited number of characters, concrete language and repeated language patterns, a clear problem which appears throughout the story, a story that includes moral lessons, different aspects of the targeted culture and a vocabulary that can be easily adopted by learners to every day speech.

The first step prior to the actual act of story listening is the introduction of the new vocabulary contained in the story, or in other words to present the content obligatory language

(the structures as well as the vocabulary which are needed to understand the content of the story).Some scholars do criticize this activity arguing that vocabulary can never be taken out of the text and taught first, but the majority of them support the first idea explaining that students do not have the same vocabulary basis , whenever they don't understand any vocabulary , they have nothing to relate when listening .This fact results in a total frustration , misunderstanding and a boring learning context. (Redmond, 1994 quoted in Fields, 1999).

- Teachers in this stage may write 'the story title' on the board and ask his learners to imagine what may the title stands for? Or to ask them to imagine and try to visualize and describe the settings and events of the story and why not characters who may appear from the title.
- The interaction between the teacher and the learners in this prior stage may turn around telling riddles jokes or anecdotes that include some story elements .Still this stage needs an extensive teacher's preparation.

A.IV.8.2.While storytelling

Its time for the actual listening. Listener require a suitable physical setting or an appropriate mood to feel comfort throughout the story listening task. Learners in this phase should be encouraged to relax and concentrate on comprehension and storytelling experience enjoyment.

The teacher in this phase tend to deepen comprehension and increase students' participations through a planned pauses during listening and let students to predict or imagine the coming events .In some cases students are invited to suggest an end to the story and open the way to a post storytelling activities .

This phase is especially devoted for developing students ' imagination, prediction and concentration.

A.IV.8.3.Post storytelling stage (Games and activities)

After listening to the story for many times, what comes is a variety of post listening activities which tend to improve learners 'level of collaboration and cooperation in a meaningful communication for developing their story sense through talking with students about their listening experience after the story.

-a/ The most used activity in this stage is *comprehension questions* that follow the story which has been told to stimulate speaking as it determines their story understanding.

Example: * Where does the story takes place?

-b/ Another pre -storytelling activity which belong to the same scale is '*true false questions*', where students are given a set of extracts from the story and it depends on their concentration and understanding to decide whether the statements are true or false .

Example: * The prince has decided to visit Denmark.

True

False

*The royal family includes only the king and the queen.

True

False

- c/ '*Multiple choice questions*' is another activity which assesses learners' concentration and understanding. The teacher gives the extracts from the story in a form of an indirect questions and adds many prepositions for each sentence.

Example:

- The story takes place in
 - Ireland
 - Scotland
 - England
- Henry is
 - the prince
 - the advisor
 - the baron

d/ Another activity is the '*the story mapping*' or create an oral discussion around the story structure (main characters , problems, major events and the solution to the problem).

-e/ Discussing the main themes of the story and what moral lessons it includes .This oral activity allows the learners to reflect on their interpretations each of them has of the story and their own prior knowledge as well as life experiences which may effect those interpretations.

-f/ To *retell* the story, this activity is very fruitful in developing students' speaking abilities .Learners are asked to retell the story they listened to using their own words and their personal way of selecting appropriate descriptive and expressive language to develop characters , settings, create the mood...ect. Story retelling teaches the FL learners to use a clear voice , communicating a clear storyline and it tests their extent of both understanding and concentration as it provides oral fluency practice .It supports the view which says that " whatever the stories students are working with , they need the chance to be storytellers themselves " .

Trough the introduction of retelling activity it appears clearly that every telling will vary in terms of language , emphasis and details.

In this activity, students do usually rely on the following questions to reconstruct their new stories:

- Who were the characters in the story?
- What happened in the story?
- Where did the story take place?
- When did the story take place?
- Why did the action happen in the way it did?

-g/ Dramatization , in case of dealing with short and simple stories with a limited number of characters ,performing the activity of dramatization with small groups in the classroom will be efficient to enhance speaking .Each one takes on a different character from the story and acts out his role in collaboration with the other students .

Since learners love dramatic play, this activity is an appropriate vehicle to provide them with a natural way to recreate a story.

In dealing with the same activity, in cases of dialogues included in the story, students are asked to act them out in front of their classmates. This activity enhances learner's creativity and oral fluency practice.

-h/ Oral cultural aspects discussions through which students are asked to discover the different cultural aspects contained in the story, discuss their characteristics and compare them with students original culture (depict cultural difference and commonalities)

Conclusion

Educators have long known that the arts can contribute to student academic success and emotional well being. The ancient art of storytelling is especially well-suited for student exploration. As a folk art, storytelling is accessible to all ages and abilities. No special equipment beyond the imagination and the power of listening and speaking is needed to create artistic images. As a learning tool, storytelling can encourage students to explore their unique expressiveness and can heighten a student's ability to communicate thoughts and feelings in an articulate, lucid manner. These benefits transcend the art experience to support daily life skills. In our fast-paced, media-driven world, storytelling can be a nurturing way to remind students that their spoken words are powerful, that listening is important, and that clear communication between people is an art. Classroom activities in dealing with this technique should be designed according to the learners' interest, needs and comprehension abilities.