

The Use of Stories in Teaching English for Children¹

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Introduction

It is commonly believed that teaching children is much more complicated than teaching adults. To successfully teach children a second language requires specific skills and intuitions that differ from those appropriate for adult teaching (Brown, 2001: 87). The following parts of this particular writing will mainly explore some basic principles of teaching English to children, what the teacher should do in the classroom, the advantages of using stories as one kind of teaching resources to be used in the classroom, and some criteria of selecting stories as teaching resources for teaching children. This particular writing will be beneficial for those involved in the teaching English as a second language for children. This may give additional input in conducting effective reading classroom for children.

Teaching English for Children

Brown proposes five categories that may be effectively used to give some practical approaches to teaching children, namely: (1) Intellectual Development;

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(2) Attention Span; (3) Sensory Input; (4) Affective Factors; and (5) Authentic, Meaningful Language.

In terms of their intellectual development, children are said to be in the period of function. They tend to understand to the purposes of language rather than on the rules and also explanations of the language items. Therefore, considering children's intellectual development, in conducting the teaching and learning in the classroom teachers need to avoid explaining grammar explicitly (e.g. by using terms like "present progressive" or "relative clauses"), and also stating the grammatical rules by using abstract terms. It would be better if they show their children certain patterns and examples in explaining the grammatical concepts (Brown, 2001: 88).

In teaching children teachers need to consider also their length of attention. Most children will spend many hours watching their favourite cartoon movies and they may spend less than an hour listening to their teachers' explanation. This commonly happens when they find the explanation or the lessons boring, useless, or too difficult. Teachers, however need to make the lessons more interesting, lively, and fun. They need to know their students interest, use variety of activities, as well as having sense of humor to get their students attention. In conducting the teaching, teachers also need to stimulate all five senses of the students (Brown, 2001, 89). Therefore, they need to consider using physical activities (such as role-play, playing games), use sensory aids and also their own nonverbal language. Teachers should realize that their nonverbal

language is very important for their students since most children tend to be very sensitive to facial features, gestures and touching (Brown, 2001: 89).

Finally, in order to have an effective English classroom, teachers also need to consider the category of authenticity of the materials as well as the use of meaningful language in their classroom. This is particularly in line with their students intellectual development. Children are commonly very sensitive to the language which is used in their familiar context of situation, therefore the use of story lines, familiar situations and characters, real-life conversations, meaningful purposes in using language are strongly recommended in establishing the context of the language use as well as improving children's attention and retention (Brown, 2001: 90).

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Considering the five basic principles in teaching English for children, it seems that teachers need to be very creative in selecting the materials as well as conducting their teaching. This particular study proposes one alternative material of teaching English for these particular learners. One of the most effective media that can be used to teach English to children is the use of story.

Stories, which relies so much on words, are believed to offer a major and constant source of language experience to children. There some important reasons why stories can be very effective in teaching language to children (Wright, 2004: 4-5).

1. Motivation

Most children like stories and they may spend much of their time and attention to listen or to read stories. This however, will lead to a very strong motivation to learn and understand not only the stories but also the language used to deliver the story.

2. Meaning

By using stories, teachers will be able to teach not only the language but also moral values to their students. Therefore, teachers need to be selective in using this kind of medium of instruction. They need also to consider the moral values underlying each of the stories used in the classroom in order to match with the local, as well as the national culture. They need also to be aware of the foreign cultural biases that may be found in the stories. If it is possible, it would be much beneficial if they can find those containing the local and national cultural values.

3. Fluency

Stories also can improve the students' fluency in terms of encouraging their receptive skills, namely, listening and reading and also encouraging their productive skills, namely, speaking and writing. Reading and listening to stories may develop the students' skills of searching for meaning,

predicting, and guessing. The experience of the story is also beneficial in encouraging responses through speaking and writing in the language. Children may begin with expressing their likes or dislikes and exchange their ideas related to the story they hear or read.

4. Language Awareness

Stories can help the children be aware of the language. They can be used to introduce children to the language items and sentence constructions.

5. Communication

Stories are also useful in developing the children ability to express their feeling, share their ideas with other children. This may lead to the ability to communicate with others.

Suitable Fiction for the Classroom

Stories are considered to be very beneficial in improving the children ability in understanding as well as encouraging the children to use the language. Therefore, it is the teachers' main duty to find and select the suitable stories for their children. There are a great variety of resources available nowadays. Teachers may find the stories from books, internet website, magazine and many other resources.

However, a good collection of books in the classroom should include the following range, depending on the age of the children (Gamble and Yates 2002: 151):

Fairy tales	Adventure
Traditional tales	Classics
Myths and legends	True stories
Fables	Humorous stories
Science fiction	Historical (those written about long ago as well as those written a long time ago)
Horror	Books dealing with 'issues'
School stories	Contemporary realism
Animal stories	Graphic novels (comic strips)
Fantasy	Books reflecting popular culture, e.g. television and film tie-ins
Mysteries	Picture books
Nursery rhymes	Picture books without words
Rhyming stories	Books in series
Poetry	Autobiography
Short story collections	
Anthologies	
Plays	Books written by the children themselves
Stories from a range of cultures	

In addition, within this the collection should include:

- books by a range of significant established authors and newly published work;
- multiple copies of some texts;
- big books for sharing as a class;
- collections of books by particular authors, illustrators or on themes;
- books of different sizes and lengths;
- hardback and paperback versions;
- dual textbooks and other books written in different languages and scripts;
- books written with different formats, e.g. in letters;
- a range of levels of textual difficulty and style;
- books in different formats, e.g. pop-up books, novelty books;
- CD-ROM talking books;
- story tapes of favourite texts;
- video versions of books;
- a permanent collection supplemented by loan books from internal and external sources.

Teachers may also try to open some websites from the internet to find stories.

Some of the websites are:

- **www.world-english.org**
- [//www.englishclub.com/reading/short-stories.htm](http://www.englishclub.com/reading/short-stories.htm)

The most important point to bear in mind is that those stories must be suitable with our local and national cultural values. Teachers need to be very careful in choosing the stories to be used in the classroom. They must be aware of the cultural biases that may be internalized within each story in order to maintain the local and national cultural values. Together with this paper, I include some short stories taken from one of those websites.

Conclusion

Teachers may consider using stories in teaching English for children for several reasons. The first reason is stories offer a major and constant source of language experience for children. They are also inexpensive. The other reason is that stories may motivate the children to learn the language as well as develop and encourage their language skills.

Teachers need to be selective in choosing the stories to be used in the classroom in order not to breakdown the local and national cultural values.

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