

Developing Young Learners' Speaking Skills Through Storytelling Technique

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Abstract: Everybody, both young learners and teenagers, as well as adults, loves stories, whether these stories are fairy tales, folktales, legends, fables or short stories, because they are based on real-life incidents experienced by learners themselves, therefore implementation of storytelling technique is considered one of the most beneficial approaches for teaching speaking to different age group learners. This technique is a unique way for developing an understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, as well as it can promote a positive attitude towards people from different lands, races and religions. Young learners are extremely energetic and have a lot of physical energy, as they play, they learn and practice social skills, including communication and language skills, and stories play a significant role in their language learning process, as well as enhancing their speaking skills.

So, this article deals with the benefits of using storytelling techniques in teaching and developing young learner's speaking skills.

Keywords: young learners, primary classes, storytelling technique, language acquisition, speaking, cognitive development, language skills, communicative activities.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners is different from teaching teenagers and adults. It is one of the most demanding, at the same time challenging and rewarding job. Young learners are social, energetic, playful, naturally curious, still developing and able to formulate their own language rules through comprehensible language input, as well as they are open to what happens in the classroom. They learn languages through playing games, practicing social skills, including communication and language skills. Young learners are "me"-focused learners and they respond emotionally to learning activities. Therefore, teachers should know how to create a warm, friendly English atmosphere in the classroom, how to use different types of activities and how to set up activities in order to enable children to work together in groups.

Speaking is one of the most important skills, which allows learners to communicate with each other and express their thoughts and feelings, and the goal of teaching speaking is communicative efficiency. Telling a story or using storytelling techniques in the classroom is one of the most effective ways of teaching speaking in English to young learners. It is fun, as they create a motivating and challenging atmosphere in the classroom and help children enhance a positive attitude towards English.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Young learners learn better with stories, as stories are energizers and can lead to harmony, understanding, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Stories are unquestionably a significant tool in the learning process. They are not only a rich resource in language learning and teaching, but

also they offer a wider window on the world, and through them children learn much more than words. Telling stories can reduce the stress in the classroom, promote literacy and speaking, as well as help children develop thinking strategies and language skills.

So, why is storytelling considered one of the most effective approaches and why do teachers need to use stories in teaching speaking to younger learners?

A.Wright, in his book “Storytelling with Children” defined some important factors on effectiveness of stories in teaching languages to children:

- **Motivation.** Stories lead to a very strong motivation to learn and understand the story and the language used to deliver the story
- **Meaning.** Teachers, using stories in their classes, will be able to teach both the language and moral values.
- **Fluency.** Stories will improve fluency as well as promote language learning, as there are a lot of acting roles and practicing dialogues
- **Language awareness.** Stories can help the children to be aware of the language.
- **Communication.** Stories develop young learners’ ability to communicate and to share their ideas with others

Methodologists Slattery & Willis state that “*young learners acquire language unconsciously. The activities you do in class should help this kind of acquisition. Stories are the most valuable resource and they offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on stories can help children practice listening, speaking, writing and reading*”. According to Cameron, ‘*stories use a holistic approach to language teaching and learning*’ as “*stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go*”, and Al Harrasi stresses that “*stories can educate moral lessons to children for instance, the good people are rewarded and the bad are punished. Stories also provide authentic uses of language*”. Moreover, Rivers states that young learners “*Love to imitate and mime; they are uninhabited in acting out roles, and they enjoy repetition because it gives them a sense of assurance and achievement*”.

So, taking into account all above-mentioned methodologists’ opinions we can say that stories play a beneficial role both in teaching speaking to young learners and improving their language acquisition, as well as cognitive skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Naturally, children love stories, as they enjoy listening and retelling, as well as acting, and, of course, they want to understand what is happening. In addition, being engaged in story events makes children try to predict what will happen next and guess the meaning of new words. This may lead to the ability to communicate with others and improves young learners’ fluency in terms of encouraging their receptive skills.

Although stories are excellent to use in the classroom, teachers need to use them from the students’ own culture and heritage, but, first, teachers should select stories carefully according to their teaching objectives and their pupils’ needs.

Ellis & Brewster point out, that when choosing a story, teachers need to select carefully “*authentic storybooks that are accessible, useful and relevant for children learning English*”. That is why methodologists suggest the following criteria, which should be taken into consideration for selecting the right story in teaching young learners:

- ✓ **The theme** - the story should deal with a topic children are learning about in English class.
- ✓ **Appropriate language level** – the language should be accessible, but rich, authentic and expressive as well.

- ✓ **A clear storyline** – children should be familiar with about 75% of the language in order to understand the story.
- ✓ **Plenty of repetition** – if children are exposed to repeated chunks of language, they will immediately pick them.
- ✓ **Content** - it should be interesting, fun, motivating, memorable and should encourage participation while developing imagination and arousing curiosity.
- ✓ **Helpful illustrations** –it should have high quality illustrations, which synchronize with the text; a good visual aid provides a supportive context for language learning and helps children understand the story.

Therefore, while selecting activities, teachers should follow the following principles:

- ✓ *provide plenty of opportunities for children to work in pairs or groups. This encourages maximum participation and individual practice in speaking.*
- ✓ *use instructions, which have a clear and strong beginning, middle, and end, they should introduce things using strong opposites, address absolute meanings and should have strong emotional and moral appeal.*
- ✓ *take into account learner differences in developmental levels and individual characteristics.*

When teachers incorporate storytelling into their English lessons in Primary education, they can create a dynamic and interactive learning environment that fosters language development and sparks young learners' imagination and creativity. In order to improve young learners' speaking skills teachers should take into account the following specific tips for using storytelling:

- **Choosing age-appropriate stories.** Stories should be suitable for young learners in terms of content and language complexity;
- **Using visual aids.** Colorful visual aids, such as pictures, flashcards should be chosen in order to help support comprehension, capture the attention and make the story more engaging
- **Encourage interaction.** In order to encourage young learners actively participate in storytelling process teachers should use simple questions, invite them to predict or retell some parts of the story.
- **Focusing on vocabulary.** New words should be chosen in the context of the story and provide opportunities to practice using them in communication. Teachers should know the ways of designing vocabulary activities related to the story in order to reinforce learning.
- **Follow up with activities.** In order to help reinforce comprehension and vocabulary retention hands-on activities, such as drawing, writing, role-playing, crafting related to the story should be chosen.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, we can state that teaching speaking to young learners through storytelling technique provides a possibility to communicate in real-life situations, discussing the plot of the story and presenting it. Through stories we, teachers, can increase children's exposure to English and help them build their own vocabulary, involving them directly in their learning process and it is considered an effective way to attract young learners' attention to learning to English, as they are interested in acting out.

So, there are a lot of advantages of using stories in teaching speaking to young learners, as telling stories can:

- ✓ *reduce the stress in the classroom;*
- ✓ *promote literacy, speaking and listening skills of young learners;*
- ✓ *develop thinking strategies and promote social and emotional development;*

- ✓ *allow the child to use his or her imagination more fully;*
- ✓ *enable children to empathise with unfamiliar people/places/situations*

In addition, the benefits of implementing storytelling technique in teaching speaking and promoting young learners' language skills are great as it increases children's willingness to communicate, encourage cooperation, develop imagination and creativity, enhance speaking skills, as well as understanding comprehension.

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