Storytelling Techniques for Improving the Speaking Skills of the Students at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract: Storytelling techniques provide opportunities to improve spoken English. The paper shares some experiences and materials used by the paper writer in her classrooms. The materials are tried to be used in large classrooms and found to be useful to not only for improving the oral proficiency of the students but also other aspects of language teaching like idioms, collocation, reading to write stories by using newspaper etc. With slight modification, most of the activities can be used by teachers for students at intermediate level in a heterogeneous class.

Introduction:

Jeremy Harmer (1991) suggests that rehearsal, feedback and engagement of the students in every activity is crucial for motivating the students. The aim of spoken English is to enable students to communicate in the target language. It is important to: (i) expose the learners to maximum use of language. (ii) help them to see how language functions in different situations. (iii) help them to internalize the rules of grammar. Speech like writing, being a productive skill must follow enough receptive experience through listening or reading.

Types of speaking activities:

1.Controlled activities: To give students confidence and support,

2. Awareness activities: To increase sensitivity in students to what they are learning,

3. Fluency activities: To give students the practice they need to use English for communication,

4. Feedback tasks: To allow students to reflect on their own performance so that they become aware of areas in which they have to improve.

Speaking tasks should offer numerous opportunities such as asking questions and giving answers, generating discussions, dialogues, role plays, language games etc. and also facilitate assessing and monitoring the progress on day to day basis. According to O'Malley & Pierce (1996) " Assessment of oral language should focus on a student's ability to interpret and convey meaning for authentic purposes in interactive contexts." Hence the techniquethat is suggested here, not only facilitates teaching but also enables a teacher to monitor the progress of the student participants.

Cooperative Learning and Assessment Environment:

Language learning in groups allows the students to interact with others by using functional and academic English. Since a students' progress in oral communication is easily observed by the teacher, it is possible to change materials that target the areas that needs improvement. Story telling techniques allow a teacher to plan not only tasks to practice the target language but also to assess and document the progress, incorporate peer assessment etc. These techniques ensure communicative setting in the classroom. Real life situations can be created after discussion of the events based on the story that is shared. This ensures students to learn language in naturally occurring situations while they discuss, develop, argue and create their own stories and drama to perform for peer assessment. Since the tasks that are used to enhance speaking skills involve narrating a picture story; role-plays; pair work information gap exchanges; discussions etc., the technique suggested here would meet the demands of such tasks. Teacher can also observe and evaluate the performance and there by assess oral communication when a group of students develop a story together. The technique can lead to better listening skills, enhancement of vocabulary, knowledge base and sentence structure as was observed by researchers in the area (Massa K 2008). While discussing the advantages of using the technique, Massa K. 2008 found that story telling techniques helps the participants in the following ways:

- Develop personal relationships among the students
- Provide daily opportunities for language development.
- Create opportunities to interact regularly on a one to one basis.
- Challenge students to talk, think, and explore their knowledge of the world.
- Support students as they develop the language and learning strategies necessary to articulate and extend their interactions with the world.

Story telling In Indian Classrooms:

Reading literature on storytelling techniques to enhance the speaking skills of the students, prompted me to attend training in storytelling. From the workshops, I understood how the students can be motivated, what sort of support is needed to involve the students. I also become aware that these techniques can be implemented only after removing anxiety form the minds of students by doing energizing activities, warm up activities etc. I used all the techniques to remove inhibitions in the minds of the students. I also realized that story telling allows the teachers to focus on their soft skills like problem solving skills, learning to work in teams, ability to be self-assertive, but not aggressive, time Management. Other personality improvement traits like- becoming more responsible, develop organizational skills like delegating responsibility, conflict management, conflict resolution, anger management, communication skills, creativity while speaking and writing, listening skills, being courteous, adaptable like willing to change and adjust, lifelong learner also can be focused by using these techniques. There also focuses on intellectual traits like integrity – honest, ethical, does what's right self reflective practices, helpful, collaborative learning etc.

How to motivate students to involve in story telling activities?

Many students think that story telling is not for teenagers. I faced this problem initially while adapting story telling techniques in the class. So, in one of my classes I made the students to watch a video on Youtube where Steve Jobs is described as a great story teller. In the video he launches his first Apple Smartphone by use of short phrases that rise the interest of the audience. By showing such videos students can be made to understand the importance of using story telling techniques while marketing products or even while doing product launch.

Another interesting piece of article is By Mr. Narayana Murthy of Infosys. His convocation address at MIT , which is available online, discusses his 'Life's Lessons'. It is an excellent example of using story telling techniques to captivate the audience. He speaks of planned and unplanned events in his life that transformed the company, which provides jobs to many. Martin Luther King's speech 'I Have a Dream' is also can be played in the class to ask the students to talk about their dreams for self, for the society and for the country itself. There is no dearth of materials for involving the students in story telling techniques . Online tools like Voki allows students to take any Avatar to talk about his dreams for future. Many of my students created Vokis to talk about their future using such tools.

Story telling techniques, theatre techniques go hand in hand. We can select a story from a news paper, can ask the students to develop a dram out of it by using dance, music, chorus etc. In one of the activities, I divided a story into three parts, or three scenes, just explained the scene to each group. They have to develop a narrative for which other team members

enact a drama. These strategies allow the students to work in teams, listen to other's point of view, negotiate a solution to any difference opinion.

 Types of Stories that can be used in the classroom:

1) Personal-experience stories (Autobiographical stories)(Like Mr Narayana Murthy's Speech)
2) Documentary stories like Steve Jobs product launch
3) Traditional stories (such as Animal fables, Fairy tales, Epics, and Legends).
4) Original creative stories

Different Drama Techniques that can be Employed While Teaching Story Telling :

1. Reading and Performance Technique: In reading and performance technique, the students can be given a story with dialogues. Many resources are uploaded by English language teachers, which can be adapted by to suit the level, needs and interest of the students. By Using the models shared by Aron Shephers,(http://www.aaronshep.com) I developed some activities that require students to practice dialogue with team mates. In this activity, students perform by reading the dialogue.

2. Reading aloud by taking turns. This technique I learnt in a workshop where the focus was on teaching literature through drama. A poem was written on the board or can also be shown on a slide. Students take turns to read by making necessary pauses whenever a pause needs to be made. This activity can begin with two students reading the passage taking turns, Then they will be joined by two more students, where they read aloud together. After completion of reading two more students join them to read, This makes the students to cooperate with other readers, enables shy students to actively take part in story telling with team mates.

3. Rubrics can be developed by the teams to assess the performance of the group. The teacher can make the students to focus on Elements of Story like- Title, characters (their histories, thoughts, decisions, follow-through on decisions, actions, etc), characters' ways of speaking and ways of moving. Other elements like the place, setting, time (continuous, or jumps, flashbacks), plot) -- in one or two sentences, objects and sensory elements in the story (Smells, Flavours, Colours, Textures, etc.), emotions in the story (for the characters, the teller, and the listeners. Perfomance of story tellers which are uploaded on You tube can be shown to identify these elements to incorporate in their stories.

Some prompts that can be used initially are as follows:

- Something That Happened in the Past twenty four Hours (remembering experiences)

- A Favorite Grandmother Story (remembering stories).

- Four Words (a game for creating stories.)

- A Character Who Wants Something, and Seeks to Overcome Challenges (remembering stories and experiences, and creating stories).

- An Eye-opening Experience (remembering experiences)

The following are some of the materials that can be used in doing story telling activities :

Handouts:

1. Stories from Proverbs

Activity: Use a Proverb and tell a Story or Real life Experience

Level: Intermediate and above

Learning Objectives**:**

To improve the vocabulary of the students

To improve the oral skills of the students in ESL contexts

To encourage the learners to recollect and articulate their experiences to the audience

To inculcate the habit of listening

To encourage group and pair work

Students Material:

1. Collection of magazines , scissors, colour pencils/ pens

2. Hand out on story structure

3. Hand out 2 - proverbs

4. Puppet making material(optional)

Instructions to the teacher:

Please follow the following steps in doing the activity:

Step one: Distribute the hand out with the table describing how the plot of a story to be developed.

Generate talk from the audience by sharing personal stories and folk tales, by giving two or three examples

Step two: Show proverbs on a slide and ask the audience to come up with story. (They can choose a picture from a magazine to use it as a puppet- potion)

Step three: After giving 20 minutes time to develop a story of their own, they share it in pairs, later share with class.

Variation: If each person has a picture or a puppet, in groups they can arrive at a new story using the plot structure. Groups can tell the story with dance and music too.

Hand out : Plot Structure of a Story

Steps	Elements	Examples
1	Character	Human beings- young or old, male or female, boy or a girl
2	Setting	Village. Town, city or a water body- ocean / lake/ rivers, forest, mountain, desert etc
3	Time	now, in the past or in future
4	Problem	Lost something, unable to get something, looking for something that is difficult to get, under curse or a spell, stolen something and into trouble, into trouble for something not done, family needs something to be done
5	Reason for the problem	Vengeance, hatred, criticism, lack of goal, lost in innocence, ignorance
6	Source for Solutions	Change of mind, confidence, belief in oneself, help from god or others, good Samaritan come to assist in the struggle, loyalty, commitment, faith, optimism
7	How solution is achieved?	Remembers or discovers power , comes out of spell due to a helper, magical powers, intelligence, friendship
8	Conclusion -1 Personal level	back to what is lost, more knowledge, finds treasure, get married, finds what is lost or taken away, more wisdom or experience from trouble
9	Conclusion – 2 future	Benefits to the others: lives happily for ever, the society benefits, more blessings, more rains, no suffering, more rewards than the beginning

Adapted to suit Indian Classrooms :Source: Forest H (2000)   *Plot Structure Scenarios Devised* . http://www.storyarts.org/

2. Sentence Prompts- Personal stories

1	And then the girl said something that caused the blood to completely drain from my face.
2	As she stepped out of the school that night, into the wintery air, walking with the

	talking Henry to their car in the far parking lot, she had the sensation that she had been seen. And she had not even known she'd felt invisible. Olive Kittredge by Elizabeth Strout p. 213
3	Vanessa said...This darkness troubles me. I yearn for the light. This silence is so deep. I long for voices, the drumming of rain, the whistle of wind, music. Why are you being so cruel to me? Let me see. Let me hear. Let me live. I beg of you. I am so lonely in this bottomless darkness. So lonely. Lost. Dean Koontz, Demon Seed, page 1
4	I am at the bottom of a well. The walls are damp and slimy. My fingers slip on the mossy stones. Sometimes i think i will never be able to pull myself out of this dark place." Shades of Simon Gray, Joyce McDonald
5	"But Mademoiselle, you are the bright center of our system. How may the sun, around which we all revolve, leave its planets spinning?" from Octavian Nothing by M.T. Anderson pg. 34
6	"I am at the bottom of a well. The walls are damp and slimy. My fingers slip on the mossy stones. Sometimes I thinkIi will never be able to pull myself out of this dark place." Shades of Simon Gray, Joyce McDonald

3. Pair work -Write similar sentences: Dialogue Writing Practice

Original sentence	Structure	Your sentence
Tense muscles readied themselves to uncoil. Necks craned. Eyes crinkled. Fights broke out. And when the last kite was cut, all hell broke loose." Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner, page 52)		Use separate sheet
They race. They race in the rain and they race in the snow. Although they race side by side, they are actually racing away from each other, sifting themselves apart. I am fast. You are slow. I win. You lose. Jerry Spinelli &Maniac Magee		

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (from Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things)		
As if a magician's wand had touched him, the garland of roses transformed him into a vision of Oriental beauty." Kate Chopin, THE AWAKENING, pg. 150, Barnes & Noble Books	Conjunction + possessive noun + verb + noun phrase + preposition + noun phrase	
"If I hadn't gone outside, I don't know if I would have heard the scream." Maggie Stiefvater, Shiver, p. 38	Conditional clause + main clause + conditional clause	
Kathy said... "Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in." Sandra Cisneros, The House on Mango Street p. 4	Noun + verb in continuous tense + conjunction + noun phrase + verb in passive + infinitive verb + verbal phrase	
Anonymous said... "Eyes may be the window to the soul, but shoes are the gateway to the psyche." Linda O'Keeffe	Noun + Modal verb + Preposition + noun + Conjunction + noun + verb + Noun phrase+ preposition + Noun	
I could have screamed, but I didn't. I could have fought, but I didn't."		

Maggie Stiefvater Shiver p. 1		
"The door of the morning room was open as I went through the hall, and I caught a glimpse of Uncle Tom messing about with his collection of old silver." P.G. Wodehouse, The Code of the Woosters, p. 11		
,"Forgive me. I continue to underestimate the breath of your ignorance." Ransom Riggs, Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children		

Sentences retrieved on 12 Nov 2014 @ http://greatsentences.blogspot.in

Eric Miller, The founder of World Story telling Institute, suggest the following:

After Telling a Story Ask "Open Questions" (questions with no right or wrong answers), such as,

1) Tell one specific thing -- an image, an action by a character, etc -- you liked about the story, or about the way the story was told.

2) Tell one thing you did not like about the story. Might you like to add to the story, or change it in any other way? Offer suggestions for improvement regarding how the story was told.

 3) Might the story remind you of any personal experience, or of some other story?

4) Does the story seem to teach any lessons?

The above reflections allow the students to actively involve as audience while a story telling session in progress. We should not forget that audience are important when a story is shared. Hence equal importance should be given to audience also. This aspect needs to be stressed to the students when they tell stories.

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