

FOLKTALES, RHYTHM, PUPPETRY: PROVIDING A CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR MOTIVATING THE ESL LEARNER

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The population of children who have limited English-speaking skills (LES) is expected to increase dramatically for at least the next fifteen years (Enright & McCloskey, 1985). Most teachers agree that one educational goal should be to assist these students to become fluent in English (Oller, 1983). However, classroom practices have not kept up with these findings (Hudleson, 1984).

According to some theorists, methods of language teaching are a lot like the roads of the Roman empire, they all lead to the same destination. Any of them can get us to Rome, or better yet, to heaven. However, there are enough cases of failure in language teaching to cause thoughtful teachers to wonder.

Aren't some methods in fact better than others? (Oller, 1983, p.39)

Current research in second language development has provided new information about how children learn a second language (Gass, 1983, 1985; Gass & Madden, 1985; Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Krashen, 1982, 1985). The research strongly suggests that non-English-speaking children need to be provided with classroom experiences that include interaction, participation, and a holistic environmental approach to learning English.

Goodman (1986) wrote that "language is learned best when the focus is not on the language but on the meaning being communicated" (p.10). Language is learned when there is a need to express oneself and to understand others. In other words, it must be used functionally and purposefully. To do this, it is necessary to provide students of a language

with the opportunities to ask questions, listen to answers, react, and ask more questions (Goodman, 1986).

Whole language programs get it all together: the language, the culture, the community, the learner, and the teacher. What makes language very easy or very hard to learn?

It's easy when:

It's real and natural.
It's whole.
It's sensible.
It's interesting.
It's relevant.
It belongs to the learner.
It's part of a real event.
It has social utility.
It has purpose for the learner.
The learner chooses to use it.
It's accessible to the learner.
The learner has power to use it.
(Goodman, 1986, p.8)

It's hard when:

It's artificial.
It's broken into bits and pieces.
It's nonsense.
It's dull and uninteresting.
It's irrelevant to the learner.
It belongs to somebody else.
It's out of context.
It has no social value.
It has no discernible purpose.
It's imposed by someone else.
It's inaccessible.
The learner is powerless.

The processes of children's first and second language development are facilitated through "active participation in a linguistic environment attuned to the child's communicative needs" (Enright & McCloskey, 1985, p.431) (□ Backlund, 1985; Courtney, 1974; Holdaway, 1979). Holdaway (1979) said "Learning to read and write ought to be one of the most joyful and successful of human undertakings" (p.11). He also stated that the acquisition of literacy calls for an effective learning environment "alive with activity which is felt to be deeply purposeful in all the ways of human meaning" (p.14). Folktales, rhythm, and puppetry offer creative opportunities to provide such a linguistic environment.

"Folktales for the ESL Elementary School Classroom" is a program developed to provide experiences for students that will maximize the students' active participation in the learning process. It is a text of story adaptations that become tools for language development using visual, aural, and kinesthetic modes of learning strategies. Students work

through a storytelling process that begins with a listening activity in the form of a synopsis to be read by the teacher. The second step of the process is the telling of the story by the teacher and students together, with the simple choruses and chants included in the story. These choruses are integrated with movement and with puppets. The final step is the creation of original drawings, dialogues, choruses, and puppets, and the creation of new stories and/or adaptations of the story that was read.

The concepts and content of ESL curricula can be introduced through this technique, which uses elements from the theater and form the world of art and folklore as tools for developing better English skills through integrating language, rhythm, rhyme, puppetry, and storytelling (Bosma, 1987). Interaction between teacher and child, child and child, child and puppet, and teacher and puppet offers the student practice in common speech patterns of English, and aids the student to develop a reserve of language concepts through associations with characters and ideas in the stories.

Throughout history, rhythmic communication has been a means of facilitating recall of information. Children demonstrate recall when they use chants, rhythmical oral patterns, when engaged in play (Bosma, 1987; Holdaway, 1979; Ong, 1982). In the case of the stories used in this work, the rhythmic activities take the form of verses that are repeated and imitated in form by the children.

Rittenberg/Kreitzer techniques (Dennis *et al.*, 1981) are used in "Folktales for the ESL Elementary School Classroom," which emphasizes drama, humor, and emotion as necessary components of the educational process. This drama-based, hands-on approach to education addresses all modes of students' learning strategies: visual, aural, and kinesthetic.

The Rittenberg/Kreitzer English Through Drama (Dennis *et al.*, 1981) approach was first developed in 1976 by Mark Rittenberg and Penelope Kreitzer to teach English "to foreign students, ranging from Japanese to Spanish, whose mother tongue is not English" (Gillon, 1980, p.7). Rittenberg and Kreitzer believe that the physical, mental, emotional, and oral involvement of all these faculties in an integrated process breaks the barriers that inhibit the learning of English by foreign students (Korber, 1981). To this end, they use techniques that encourage the student to use the new language in a way that "approximates his (sic) use of his first language" (Duffala, 1981, p.1). Their method consists of the following:

1. Active exercises with participants on their feet behaving in the language.

2. Integrative exercises to develop listening skills, memory skills, punctuation and grammar usage.
3. Increased flexibility of the voice through development of both masculine and feminine ranges.
4. Exercises in communication and feedback to allow students to learn how their communication is perceived by others.

Folk literature is very rich in its use of universal themes of humankind and in the provision of sensory adventures through picturesque and vivid language. Through simple narrative, folktales are joyful and humorous, teach moral values, and provide an all-encompassing activity that raises the linguistic consciousness of the student in an effective and enjoyable manner (Bosma, 1987; deLeon, 1976; Geller, 1982).

The many themes inherent in folktales have been well documented (Bosma, 1987; Greedlaw, 1984; Holdaway, 1979; McCaslin,, 1974, 1975; McIntyre, 1974; Woodard, 1973) for their ability to help children appreciate and understand their own and other cultures. Because folktales present a picture of a culture, they demonstrate the universality of how "people throughout the world share a need for love, hope, security, and possess feelings of happiness, anger, pride, and loneliness" (Bosma, 1987, p.3). The language of the folktales in "Folktales for the ESL Elementary School Classroom" is simple, but the concepts are widely applicable and offer many possibilities for discussion.

The particular stories included in this work were chosen because: a) they are among the most popular and beloved tales representing many different cultures; b) children can relate to them easily; c) they offer valuable insights into generic human values, relationships, and emotions; and d) they offer moral lessons, in that the anthropomorphic behaviors of the animals replicate human behaviors that range from greed to great loyalty.

The stories were also chosen for their adaptability to the classroom participation techniques of Rittenberg and Kreitzer (Dennis et al., 1981). Some stories are in the backward build-up style, as in "The Old Woman and the Pig." Some stories, such as "The Pasta Pot," include parts where children can call out expressions that can be immediately incorporated into the story. In all cases, the stories are vehicles for the use of rhythmic language.

Although the form and characters in the folktales and fables may vary, the conflicts and emotions expressed are universal. Students can write their own versions of folktales, and these stories can be acted out using the same techniques. In essence, the stories that are presented

are used to develop classroom participation activities. As teachers and students become more skillful in the above mentioned techniques, they may become motivated to develop new and creative ways to stage the stories. In addition, children may begin to collect stories from their own cultural heritage and bring them in to share. Parental involvement may be fostered as both audience and participant in communicating their cultural heritage. In addition, children are frequently inspired to create their own stories and to provide music and dance accompaniment.

In "Folktales for the ESL Elementary School Classroom," storytelling, dramatic activity, puppetry, and rhythmic language are integrated, using the principles of Rittenberg and Kreitzer (1976; 1981). Sometimes the activity begins with body language alone, but oral communication is always the target. Storytelling is used to provide rhythmic language in the form of audience participation stories involving language chants. The active learning exercises that accompany each story supplement the story or are used as role-playing activities that precede the story. The exercises range from recall activities to activities involving participants' personal experience and its application to the activity at hand.

Through acting out folktales using puppets to represent the characters, children become motivated to share feelings and thoughts, thus improving their communication skills:

Puppets are natural self-involvers. While they may appear to be largely visual playthings, they are emotional and uniquely personal extensions of the self. (Peyton, 1986, p.7)

Puppetools (Peyton, 1986) is "a communications process... designed to spark new uses of the medium and to encourage exploration at virtually any level in any setting" (p.6). **Puppetools** has as its source an unusual interpretation of the ancient and creative art of puppetry. Peyton believes that puppetry motivates, in both overt and covert ways, the act of communication: "No tool is more able to fashion priceless, irretrievable moments than the puppet" (p.6). The use of **Puppetools** as a mode of communication, is a visual one. Puppetry provides the user with visual and tactile experiences that "release creative impulses that integrate intellect and emotion" (p.9).

In addition to the opportunity to represent an idea in a tangible form, puppetry offers the user anonymity as the source of the verbal exchange. Thus, the puppeteer, through the puppet, can begin to

use the new language effectively in a free and unself-conscious manner. This allows the individual to express himself or herself verbally, without fear or embarrassment over grammatical errors.

Storytelling, dramatic activities, puppetry, and rhythmic language are independently useful media used by any creative teacher in a learning situation. The value of using folktales, rhythms, and puppetry incorporated within the framework of the program developed by Rittenberg and Kreitzer, *English Through Drama* (Dennis et al., 1981), is that they provide a creative, integrated, and educationally sound approach to teaching English as a second language.

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