

Engaging Children Through Storytelling

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As a teacher, I believe that children retain a subject that is delivered in the form of stories far longer than they do through conventional teaching methods. Storytelling, especially in the case of languages, engages children in such an effective manner that they are able to remember concepts or characters for a longer period of time.

Keeping this in mind, I thought, why not take some ideas from the students about their views on storytelling before making my own teaching plan. If teachers consult children regarding the design of class activities, it helps teachers plan according to the children's needs and interests and to enhance their engagement in the classroom process.

So, I asked the children what they thought about storytelling. This is what they shared with me: *We come to know about new words and sentence structures through storytelling. We also learn to frame questions. Reading and writing and spellings become easier because it is so much fun. We learn the right pronunciation of new words.* I felt very happy to get the children's views. Children think like us, but we adults, sometimes do not give them space to share their views on classroom processes. When teachers discuss and plan along with children, we can see their interest and engagement during the activities to which they have also given their ideas. Here is an example:

Teacher: Should we focus on all the ideas which you gave me for the story which we are going to read today or tomorrow?

Children: No, we will focus on three ideas.

Teacher: So what should we focus on?

Children: We will write the new words from the story, look up their meanings in the dictionary and also frame some sentences with the new words.

Teacher: Ok. What else should we do?

Children: We will do reading and writing practice.

Teacher: Let us decide on the story.

I gave them a few books to choose the story for the storytelling activity. They chose *Alice in Wonderland*.

I started telling the story. All the children were listening carefully, appreciating the pictures in the story as I was showing them the pictures from the storybook. Some children were carefully listening to my voice modulation while reading the story. After reading two paragraphs from the story, I asked some questions: Tell me some words from the story. Who are the main characters till now? What is the story talking about?

After listing some words which they had heard, the children said that the main characters in the two paragraphs were a little girl and a white rabbit. The story was about a little girl who was running after a rabbit. We were also talking in between about different objects and the characters which were in the imaginary world of the story. After the story ended, we had a talk on the different words they had heard for the first time and looked them up in the dictionary and framed sentences with those words. The day's class ended with a wonderful experience with the students.

The next day, I divided the students into groups of twos so that one child could learn (peer-learn) with the other. It was a reading day for the children with some children asking for the pronunciation of some words and we planned on seeing a video of *Alice in Wonderland*.

The following day, we started with a video of *Alice in Wonderland*. The children sat quietly in the library room where I had arranged the movie for them. We decided to discuss the movie after seeing it. After watching the movie some of the children said that they had not seen such a wonderful and imaginary movie before. They were all very happy to discuss the movie. They enjoyed the movie and we discussed the differences between the movie and the book. The next day, I told the students to write their own story of *Alice and the White Rabbit*. I will share some stories and different questions written by the children.

Finally, I put up six jumbled sentences based on the story and asked them to arrange those in the proper order. Most of the students were able to do

the correct sequencing of the story. We did some activities – jumbled words, fill in the blanks rhyming words – all prepared by the children.

This storytelling activity was useful because students got interested in learning a language through different activities in which they were actively involved from the planning stage. It showed that changing some strategies helps the teacher as well as the students to learn.

Some ideas for a language class

1. Involve the class from the planning stage but be clear what is to be taught.
2. Split the plan into smaller items: understanding the story, reading it, writing about it, pronunciation, sequencing, etc
3. Choose simple storybooks without too many characters.
4. Show the movie on the story, if possible. It involves the children more.
5. Let there be oral and written work.



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