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Brighton Education – Pahang State Conference

Infuse your Teaching with the Power of Storytelling

Conference Workshop

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WORKSHOP: Infuse your Teaching with the Power of Storytelling

Introduction

This is a workshop for participants at the Brighton Education conference in Pahang, 2nd March 2013.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Examine the variety of applications for this skill.
- Learn where to find or how to create useful story ideas.
- Practise strategies for lively and interesting storytelling in an atmosphere of fun and participation.
- Increase their mastery of storytelling skills and also learn some simple strategies for teaching these skills.

Materials

Facilitator needs:

- Facilitator's notes
- PowerPoint presentation
- Storytelling skills

Participants need:


- Notebook and writing materials
- Participant's Notes

Timing

The workshop time is 45 minutes. Topics will be presented quickly with a brief practice time.

1. What is so great about storytelling anyway? (5 mins)
2. Finding or creating a story. (5 Mins)
3. Preparing to present a story: (15 mins)
 - a. Learning the sequence
 - b. Movement and mime
 - c. Sound effects
 - d. Words
4. Telling the story: (15 mins)
 - a. Character Voices, Faces and Placement
 - b. Eye contact
 - c. Five senses
5. Training young storytellers (5 mins)

Procedures

This is an active workshop. The smiley face icon  indicates that there is an activity.

1. What is so great about storytelling anyway?

For those teachers who master the craft of storytelling it quickly becomes their most valuable and well-used skill. As the old Indian proverb says:

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”

Some of the advantages of using stories in any part of the curriculum are that

- stories create interest and fuel curiosity,
- stories provide a structure for remembering course material more so than isolated concepts,
- stories are a familiar and accessible form of sharing information than abstract concepts,
- telling a story from experience can create a more personal student-teacher connection.
(Green, 2003)


 *Do you remember someone telling you stories as a child?.....*

2. Choosing a story.

For the first attempt at storytelling it may be best to choose a story to retell.

The most important consideration when choosing a tale to tell is **whether you like it enough to tell it with enthusiasm**. Stories should communicate to you a need to be told.

(McKay & Dudley, 1996)

 *Do you have a favourite?*

As you become more confident, you could create your own stories to suit your particular situation.

3. Preparing to present a story

Most of us have read stories to children. There are many reasons why a good teacher reads to their children every day.

This workshop is about storytelling, not reading aloud. Most people feel quite nervous before storytelling for the first time, even to children. Naturally they want to do a really good job and leave a good impression! Here are some steps to walk through before making that first presentation.

a. Learning the sequence

The Storyteller must know the story really well. That does not mean memorising the words. You must be able to visualise it – the scenes, the characters, the actions.

Either you were actually there, *or* you must use your imagination to visualise every part.



What is your story?

What is the sequence of events?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

b. Movement and mime

Many people find mime a little awkward and even difficult. But this is a very important step in preparing the story for telling. As Gere says:

**“Bad storytelling is often static and word-based.
Children respond to physical movement and it enlivens the tales.
Mime forces the storyteller to start learning scenes and to visualize the story.”**

Mime Practice:

Participants practise some mime actions all together:



- Put on an item of clothing – e.g. hat, jacket, socks - visualise.
- Eat a specific dish of food – soup, rice, burger – don't let it change shape/size.
- Open a notebook and write in it – visualise.

Show your mimes to the person next to you. Give feedback.

Mime Actions for your Story:



Choose 3 Actions (from the chosen story) **to mime** (maybe repeatedly throughout the story):

1.
2.
3.

Show your mimes to the person next to you. Give feedback.

c. Sound effects

Children love sound effects. Unless they are onomatopoeia (woof, miaow, tap tap ... etc.) they are **not words**, just noises. Once you have mentioned a particular sound effect (and noticed how the children enjoy it!) it is good if it can be repeated periodically throughout the storytelling.

Sound effects *can* be **mouth noises** – children particularly enjoy this, but the storyteller needs to be careful about spitting!

There are many other possible sources such as body parts and objects by:

- patting,
- tapping,
- clapping
- scraping ...

Children in the audience can be employed to make sound effects at specific moments. They love to become part of the story.



Select the parts of your story, the actions (especially the mimes), which would benefit from having sound effects added.

Experiment with various sound effects. Different people will find some sounds more difficult than others. Which sound effects (not words) will you include?

.....

Compare your noises with the person next to you. Give feedback.

d. Words

It is important not to lose the actions and sounds when we add the words. Plan your story sequence and include your mimes and sound effects.

Choose your words to suit the age of the children, but it doesn't matter if they don't understand every word – they will be enthralled with the actions and sounds.

4. Telling the story

For the children in the audience, your storytelling is both a visual and an auditory experience.


a. Character Voices, Faces and Placement

It needs to be obvious just who is speaking and/or acting at all times in the story.

Dialogue really livens up a story, but it becomes tiresome for the narrator to be saying “Now the cat says ... and then the mouse says ... and then the cat says ...” etc.

The characters need to be kept separate in relation to one another. Each character should have:

- a position where the teller stands/sits/bends down
- specific facial expressions, gestures,
- voice quality – pitch, gruffness, vocab range etc.

 **Choose 2 of the characters in your story who have a conversation.**

Name 1	Name 2
Position (left / right)	Position (left / right)
Expression/gesture	Expression/gesture
Voice	Voice

Practice with the person next to you.

b. Eye contact

The storyteller must make eye contact with the audience. This will ‘hook’ them and keep them listening. They will each know that the storyteller is talking directly to them. The storyteller’s interesting movements will help to keep the children’s attention.

It’s a two-way street. The audience will feel the storyteller’s energy, and the storyteller will be energised as he feels the connection.

c. Five senses

Storytellers are often reminded to **“Show, don’t tell”**. The audience should be made aware of how things look and feel, including colours, smells, tastes, and textures. “Showing” may involve using a literary device such as a simile or metaphor rather than straight-out description.

Storytellers endeavour to paint a picture with words – and actions, and sound effects.

Similes, Metaphors, and Onomatopoeia all make nice additions, but keep it simple.

 **Suggest one part of your story where you could include all of the five senses.**

.....

What could you say about:

Sight.....

Sound.....

Smell.....

Taste.....

Touch.....

5. Training young storytellers

“Giving children the opportunity to tell and also hear stories, encourages them to develop active speaking and listening skills.” (Mynard, 2005)

- Make sure the children know the sequence of their story – discourage memorising word for word – ask them to draw picture sequence.
- The children need to be very familiar with their characters – try drawing character maps.
- Children can practise telling their story to a partner, and then in turn listen to their partner’s story. This provides valuable language practice, as well as diminishing shyness problems.
- Children can practise character voices by trying, for example, counting to 10 in different ways, such as:
 - As an angry parent – telling a child to obey right now.
 - As a young child learning to count – maybe making mistakes and repeating and correcting.
 - It’s your party and you have a disappointing number of presents, count them.
 - You are the referee in a boxing match. One man is down, count him out.
 - It is a bad phone connection and you are trying to give someone your phone number (which is 1234 5678 9 10)
 - You are counting your coins that you have been saving up in your money-box.
- Circle games where each child around the circle adds part of the story, or increases the story (such as in ‘The Emperor’s Cat’.)
- Play “Pass the Face” – a child ‘makes a face’ and shows it to his neighbour, who copies and shows it to the class. The second child then makes a different expression for the following child to copy. (Sometimes also using gestures helps shy children to show expressions.)
- Play “Catch It” – child calls to another and then throws (and names) an imaginary object. The second child catches it – while bearing in mind what ‘it’ is – then changes it to a different object to throw to another child.
- “Walk the walk” – children practise different styles of walking which can become the mime part of their storytelling. For example:
 - walking home from school knowing there are tons of chores waiting
 - walking through heavy sand;
 - walking barefoot in a very sticky and squishy swamp;
 - walking through a blistering hot desert;
 - walking through a scary place at midnight;
 - walking with your right foot in a cast;
 - walking through honey.

Some of the ideas for these activities were taken from “Storytelling!” (Codell, 2012), “Storytelling in the Early Years” (Mynard, 2005), “Teacher’s Guide: Teaching Storytelling” (Storytelling Arts of Indiana, 2012), and “Early Years Starter Pack” (Ferguson, 2007). These are all available on the Internet, and are listed in the Bibliography. (**Go look them up!**)

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