

## **Using Storytelling to Facilitate Learning English as a Foreign Language**

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Storytelling is a natural way to introduce learning English as a Foreign Language. American educator/storyteller/author will demonstrate using stories to help improve oral comprehension, conversational speaking and basic understanding of English. Participants will enjoy learning humorous stories that are designed to help practice learning English. Supporting research will be shared by the presenter along with sample stories participants can use on their own.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Storytelling is the oldest method of communication in the world. One only has to imagine how in the earliest of times primitive man used sounds, gestures and words to convey ideas and stories. Some of the earliest stories were probably based on actual events that happened to themselves or their ancestors -- cavemen around a campfire telling stories to describe their hunt and to teach their young. Other stories may have been developed to explain mysteries in nature. Stories passed from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation. They were likely embellished and changed each time they were told. Storytellers may have told tales about encounters with animals or with other people – both true and imaginary. We can only surmise why people developed the art of storytelling through the ages. But we can say with certainty that storytelling is a useful tool in education and in helping people communicate. Cultures throughout history told stories in many different ways, but they all used stories as a form of communication and for teaching and learning (Meyer & Bogdan, 2001).

Stories can inform and help educate listeners. Greek teachers once said, “If you can listen, you can learn.” Socrates, known as one of the greatest early teachers in Greece, often used the fables of Aesop in his teachings. He once said that in order to teach students truth, we need to tell them fiction. He encouraged his students to ask questions after his lessons and stories. That was a wise thing to do since there can be much truth in a story of fiction and much falsehood in a story based on facts. Another Greek, Plato, told stories to teach wisdom and to stimulate thinking. In China, Confucius told stories to arouse the desire in people for better conduct. Buddha, in India, told stories to help people seek enlightenment. In Israel, Jesus told parables (stories) to awaken beliefs and illustrate principles. In modern times, the great scientist Einstein was asked by a mother what she could do to help her son become a great scientist or mathematician. Einstein replied, “Tell him stories.” When the mother asked what to do after that, Einstein replied, “Tell him more stories.” When the mother again asked what she could do after that, Einstein replied that by then the boy ought to be old enough to read stories by himself and that he should do so.

Using stories to teach has been an accepted practice by well-known historical figures. The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, the paper will discuss the place of storytelling in today’s world of education. Second, it will address the use of storytelling to promote the learning of English as a foreign language.

## **Storytelling in Education**

A good amount of research has been done regarding the effects of storytelling in education. "Storytelling has demonstrable, measurable, positive, and irreplaceable value in teaching." Stories can help to enhance recall, retention, and application of concepts in new situations. Storytelling raises enthusiasm for learning new subject matter. (Coles, 1989) The excitement of storytelling can make reading and learning fun and can instill a sense of wonder about life and learning" (Bendt & Bowe, 2000 p. 1).

## **No Book Between the Teller and the Listener**

Every teacher can remember their earliest days in the classroom and the first time they looked into a student's eyes to see if the student understood what was being taught in class. There are cultures where individuals are taught not to question. Students are taught to agree with the teacher. The teacher might say, "Do you understand? The answer would likely be, "Yes," from the students when in reality they may not understand. If the teacher is looking only at the book and not at the learners, they might not recognize that questions exist.

It is the same with storytelling. The book is important, but when you put the book down and tell a story rather than read it, you can judge the reactions of your listeners and alter your stories as needed. When a storyteller puts down the book and relies on their ability to TELL the story, the setting can become more intimate. The listener is not limited by one description that was written by the author. They are free to envision their own tale in their mind and make stories come to life.

One of the best compliments I ever received was when a student said, "Mr. Story, those were the best special effects I have ever seen." Though my students always enjoyed having me read to them, I don't recall any time when I was able to be quite as effective at sharing a tale and getting them to want to read the book as when I told stories that day. In addition, I knew that I was true to my mission. I had put the story FIRST. It did not matter that the child did not know my name. They were impacted by my storytelling, and regular classroom teachers can have this same impact on students. Bendt and Bowe (2000) found that oral storytelling provides students with a means to improve speaking and listening skills. Craig et al. (2001) state, "Oral stories help (children) acquire the context of literacy." (p.47)

## **More Spontaneity and Feeling**

A storyteller is freer to add his/her own interpretations of stories when telling them instead of reading them. There may not be a better example of this than when I visit a kindergarten class for the second time in a short time period to tell stories. It is quite an ego boost to watch young faces light up with recognition when you walk into the classroom. "You remember what I like to do?" I ask. Then I wait out the long seconds for a response as students realize it is okay to talk aloud and participate in the discussion.

"You read us stories!" is the usual answer by the students. This is the perfect time to read a short book aloud and follow by telling the same story. The classroom bubbles with excitement when we discuss the difference between reading and telling a story. There is always more intimacy when the story is told than when it was read. The teller can speed up or slow down the tempo of the story to match the energy level of the class. The whole spirit and attitude of the class can be controlled by the teacher who reads the faces of the students and reacts to their needs.

The storyteller can also make changes in the story on the spot if it is needed based on the spontaneous behaviors they observe. In one story, The Squeaky Door, my telling improved greatly when I made a change in mid-story based on an audience reaction. When Grandma kissed her grandson goodnight in the story, one young student wiped his face with the back of his hand saying,

“Yuck! Yuck! Yuck!” At that point, he made a motion of throwing that kiss away in disgust. I copied that one spontaneous gesture, making my story better than ever. Storytelling is open to multiple interpretations and opinions, bringing about genuine interaction and participation in the classroom (Duff and Maley, 1990).

### **Bait to Reading Books**

When an audience likes a story they hear me tell, I am often asked, “Where can I get that book?” This happens with adults who hear stories as much as it does with children. When teachers share books with students, through oral reading or storytelling, those books are checked out of the library and disappear from the teachers’ bookshelves at a rate faster than other books. As much as I would like to give credit to storytelling for this benefit, reading aloud is equally effective at peaking student interest in reading books they have heard. “Storytelling is at least as effective as reading aloud for language arts development” (Hanson 2004).

Every educator should spend time every day telling stories and reading aloud to students. In doing so, the educator will increase the number of books the listeners desire to read. Children look forward to hearing teachers read a particular book or tell a favorite story. We teachers tend to become creatures of habit throughout our careers. We find a story that is our favorite and tell it year after year. One of the stories I shared each year was *Where the Red Fern Grows*, by Wilson Rawls. Former students had told younger students about sound effects I used to add my element of storytelling to parts of the book as I read it aloud. I recall how some students entering my class had already bought a copy of the book from book clubs or from stores. The bait had been taken.

The bait works so well that renowned storyteller, Bill Harley, made up and recorded stories that children and adults demanded to see in print. Children revel in the reading of his predictable stories. The bait caught so many readers that Harley had to stock the book pond with his words in printed form. Try reading – then telling one of Harley’s stories to your class. Then watch the frequency of how often the book is checked out. “Repeated readings of favorite books, (I include storytelling here.) and playing with literary language builds familiarity, increasing the likelihood that children will attempt to read these books alone” (Booth, 2005).

### **Listening to Stories Improves Comprehension**

The primary learning modality of most at-risk students is auditory. Instruction and oral sharing of stories has a direct positive impact on student learning. My dissertation studies showed that reading aloud and storytelling to students for a minimum of 15 minutes each day can help at-risk students make growth in reading comprehension, listening comprehension and in mathematics applications (solving story problems). (Lockett, 1992) In addition to listening to stories being told or read aloud in class, students can benefit from listening to recorded stories. Carbo (1989) reported gains in reading for primary students using recorded stories. Queiruga (1992) reported two-year gains in comprehension for high school students who used recorded stories to overcome reading problems.

Schools everywhere are finding that students need to improve in the area of phonemic awareness. They need more experiences, starting at a young age, with hearing sounds and learning that the sounds can be matched with letters. They need to be taught that the letters form words, words form sentences and paragraphs and that paragraphs have meaning that is relevant to the stories they have heard and are trying to read. When young children hear stories, their language skills and comprehension improves. Isbell and others (2004) found that children ages three to five benefited both by being read to and through being told stories. The group who heard the stories, however, experienced greater comprehension as demonstrated in their retelling of the stories. Cliatt

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and Shaw (1988) said, “The relationship of storytelling and successful children’s literacy development is well established.”

### **Hear Words and Recognize them in Print**

Students today are suffering from “word poverty.” John Giles, author of *The First Forest*, quoted research showing that in 1945, the average elementary student knew 45,000 vocabulary words. At the end of the century, the average elementary student knew 10,000 words. This means that if we only look at numbers, today’s students only know 40% of the vocabulary words that their parents and grandparents knew. It is important to reverse this vocabulary deficit. The more words a student hears and understands, the better the chance they will recognize the same words in print. Storytelling and reading aloud to students are good tools to help students improve their vocabulary. Along with the increase in vocabulary comes an increase in the ability to comprehend the meaning of the spoken word and improvement in reading comprehension. In their position paper on teaching storytelling the National Council of Teachers of English in the USA stated that “Listeners encounter both familiar and new language patterns through story. They learn new words or new contexts for already familiar words. (NCTE, 1992)

One of my favorite tales to tell is about Anansi the Spider. During the telling of “Why Spiders Have Big Bottoms,” I ask how many legs Anansi has. I pause to tell the listeners that Anansi was an “arachnid” or a ... spider. Following another pause, we finish what we started and say that spiders have eight legs. In class later, several students find the word arachnid easy to recognize and remember. Teachers will enjoy watching this scenario repeat itself when they begin to tell their own stories. Research supporting this was provided by Wojciechowicz (2003). “Storytelling provides an opportunity for students to expand their vocabulary as they decode the meaning of words, based on the context of the story they hear or read. Listening to stories also improves a students’ understanding of grammar and literary devices as they see them within a story. (Wojciechowicz, 2003).

### **Accustom Ears to the Tune and Cadence of Language**

It is generally understood that teachers have to work hard to motivate some students to want to read. It is also commonly accepted that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to get today’s students to speak good English, with an emphasis on good grammar. In many instances, the students do not have good role models at home or in the community where they can hear language being used properly. This goes for older learners as well as the young. Storytelling offers them the chance to hear language patterns for which they may not have been previously introduced. In *Strategies for Increasing Achievement in Reading, Educating Everybody’s Children* (ASCD, 1995) the authors tell how sharing stories aloud to young people provides good reading models that serve to improve students’ reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension. This modeling is especially important for young people with limited knowledge of English and for those who have had little or no experience listening to written English.

A good example of modeling good English was given by American storyteller Barbara Freeman. In 1984, before English training was compulsory, she came to Taiwan to give programs in public schools. She visited Taiwan in 1984 to work in Taiwanese schools. She found that children she worked with spoke about 99% Chinese and 1% English. She laughed when one child after kept saying, “How you are?”

Barbara’s response was, “Fine! How are you?” After several repetitions, children picked up on her language patterns and began asking, “How are you?”

We live in a multicultural society. Educators must do what they can to provide a wide range of experiences for students in their care. This includes providing language experiences that will help them accept and try to understand others around them. Note: Just as I discuss using storytelling to teach the use of good English in the classroom, I also use storytelling as a means of helping native English speakers to better understand other cultures. In American schools I often use dialects and vocabulary from around the world in my stories. Children and adults react positively to the use of these language patterns and copy them in their speech and in their own retelling of the tales. They become more accepting of people who speak languages other than their own.

A few years ago, I told stories at a small school in the central part of the USA. During my program, I observed a student in an adjacent room receiving private instruction. I could see from the way the child was turning his head and ear toward me that he wanted to listen to the stories instead of listening to his teacher. I continued telling my story. The teacher closed the door, leaving it open far enough to let me see the child's ear tuned in to every word I said. I talked to the teacher afterwards and found out that the boy had recently moved to the area from Russia and was learning to speak English. He was doing well, but felt self-conscious because of his accent. A few, not many, children always laughed or teased him about the way he talked. I spoke the only few Russian words I knew to him and watched him beam with joy. This child was in the audience later in the day listening with his classmates when I told a Russian folktale in dialect that was close to authentic. I also used a few of my limited vocabulary words in the tale. The child radiated with happiness, and his classmates all cheered at the end and patted him on the back. Stories had helped them become more accepting of the cultural world he had come from.

The teacher's efforts may have gotten the same result over time, especially with a hard working pleasant person like this child. But, one story made everyone more accepting of his language difference. One must be careful, however, not to use dialects that are badly done or that might be taken as slurs against a particular group or culture.

### **Hear Literature Students May Otherwise Miss**

Teachers who use storytelling in the classroom can introduce children to great literature they otherwise might miss. By making the connection between books and storytelling, the teacher introduces literature as a source of pleasure. For instance, a teacher who cares enough to share an enthusiastic reading of *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White will inspire the students to read the book on their own. Then they will also look for other books by the same author(s). When a storyteller shares a particular tale, he or she often opens up an entire area of literature that many students have not looked into before.

### **Improving Student Writing**

It is well-documented in reading research that learning to read better helps students to become better writers. Storytelling also offers students many opportunities to write and provides scaffolding on which children can build their own stories. It offers ways to bring children into the act of creating their own stories. (Trousedale, 1990) Learners who regularly tell stories become aware of how an audience affects a telling, and they carry that awareness into their writing. (NCTE, 1992)

Students can be encouraged to imagine their own endings to stories. They can keep the same characters and setting and alter the problems the characters face. Old stories can be re-written with a modern spin. Teachers are encouraged by the National Research Council (1999) to have young children dictate their own stories. "You tell me the story, and I'll write the words." When the teacher asks questions about the story in addition to merely writing down what is dictated. Children

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are often able to recognize things that are missing from their stories and can add the details. It only takes a bit of creativity for a teacher to make the most of using storytelling as a tool for teaching writing.

Every teacher is faced with the ultimate teaching challenge – the student who claims to have “nothing to write about.” A simple story can serve to help in this situation. I tell a version of a Yiddish folktale about a tailor who literally makes a story out of nothing.<sup>1</sup> I use the story as a means to help students escape what is referred to as “writer’s block” or not being able to think of something to say. Using storytelling prior to writing gives the students the chance to process their thoughts about their story and get feedback from others before writer’s block can set in. (Houston, Goolrick, & Tate, 1991)

### **Direct Instruction in Reading and Language Arts**

Storytelling helps expand children’s curiosity and extends their language and communication skills. (Simmon, 1983) It can provide direct instruction in sequencing and cause and effect. Teachers can use appropriate pauses during the telling to encourage students to make predictions and allow the students to verify their predictions as the story continues. The images brought forth by storytelling can help enhance students’ creativity and can help the students find ways to recall lessons that are taught. Skills, such as sequencing and summarizing, can be taught along with story mapping and so much more. The value of early reading and storytelling has been scientifically validated and has been shown to work! (Snow and Burns, 1998)

### **Content Area Instruction**

There are so many other areas where storytelling can be an excellent tool for teachers in all of the content areas. The National Council for the Teachers of English (1992) states that “Story is the best vehicle for passing on factual information.” They cite the example of how historical figures and events linger in children’s minds when communicated by way of a narrative (story). The American group called YES, Youth Educators and Storytellers, agrees that storytelling can be used for content area instruction. In all academic areas, storytelling enlivens the delivery of curriculum, accelerates and enhances curriculum learning and engages learners (YES, 2006).

Probably one of my favorite reasons to use stories is because they are fun and they capture the students’ interest. A skilled teacher can use a story at the beginning of class for what is called the “anticipatory set.” A story can catch the attention of every student in a class and help them to focus on points planned by the teacher. Storytelling increases attention span, makes for a higher level of cooperation, and a more positive attitude towards learning reading or any other subject.

It is not the job of the content area teacher to entertain students. Nor is it their job to be the students’ friend. However, a teacher who works to develop a collection of stories and interesting facts that relate to what they are trying to teach will find it easier to promote learning in the classroom. Inserting the right story at the right moment in a lesson can have a highly positive effect on a targeted student or on the entire class. Studies document that storytelling is an effective tool for enhancing literacy and for linking literature to content and experiences of students. (Mello, 2001)

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning tellers can find one version of the story in [Just Enough to Tell a Story](#) by Nancy Schimmel (Two Sisters Press). My own adaptation of the story can be found at [www.mikelockett.com](http://www.mikelockett.com) and downloaded at no cost.

Consider for example a student with a ruined science experiment. This student will not be in the best state of mind to benefit from further instruction. Consider the reaction of the student(s) if the teacher takes a few minutes to relate a tragic experience in the life of Thomas Edison. At one point in Edison's career, his entire laboratory burned to the ground. Edison would have had every right to be angry and full of self-pity. Most people in a similar situation would feel their life was ruined. Edison said the event was a blessing. "All of my mistakes have now been burned up, and I can start over." Two days later, Edison invented the electric light bulb.

The use of anecdotes is not typically thought of as storytelling. But it is an easy way to bring informal storytelling moments into the classroom. It serves to relieve tension and makes the classroom seem to be a warmer and friendlier place that favors learning.

### **Storytelling Has a Place in Education**

I have listed multiple reasons that I believe support the use of storytelling as an effective instructional tool. The United States Department of Education (1986) recognizes storytelling as a valuable teaching and learning tool. "Storytelling can ignite the imagination of children, giving them a taste for where books can take them (Cited in Bendt and Howe, 2000). Every state in the United States has learning standards that are supported by storytelling and story listening. "Storytelling has demonstrable, measurable, positive and irreplaceable value in teaching." (Schank, 1990) Finally, engaging in storytelling activities is a way to motivate even the most reluctant reader or writer (Miller and Pennycuff, 2008).

### **Introducing Storytelling to Educators in Taiwan**

The world is growing smaller. Nations continue to become more interdependent. Decisions and actions in each country in the world increasingly influence the actions, economies and the lives of people in other countries around the world. It is imperative that individuals who interact with people in other countries be able to communicate thoroughly with one another. This is no secret. The governments of the world acknowledge this. There have been concerted efforts by many governments to promote the learning of foreign languages in order to further global communication. Studies show that Taiwan is one such country. Taiwan promotes the learning of a foreign language to improve political and economic conditions. That language is English. English is considered by many people to be the language needed to compete in global economies.

Minhui Lu from National Taiwan Normal University (2011) in a paper presented for the 16th Conference of the Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics noted that the emphasis on teaching English to Taiwan's school age children began to increase greatly during the 1990's. Lu summarized the timeline for governmental efforts to increase English proficiency. The Ministry of Education lowered the age for beginning instruction in English education in the schools from seventh grade where it had been since 1968 to the sixth grade in 1990. Instruction in English was moved to the fifth grade in 2001 and to third grade in 2005. "Since 2005, all Taiwanese students are required to take at least one class period of English per week, from the third grade to the first year in college" (Lu, 2011). The stress on learning English means that every student in Taiwan will study at least eight years of English before going to college. I used the words "at least" because the teaching of English is very prevalent among most early childhood students and kindergarten students in Taiwan. Large numbers of private schools offer English instruction throughout Taiwan, most during after school and evening classes along with instruction on the weekends.

In addition to pressures to increase instruction in English in Taiwan, there has also been pressure to include questions about English in official tests (Summers, 2011). But, Summers wrote

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that “good results on these tests did not mean the same thing as a strong ability to communicate in English” (Summers, April 1, 2011). It seems that despite efforts to do a better job teaching English as a foreign language in Taiwan, individuals still have difficulties speaking English, understanding spoken English and using English proficiently as a means of communicating. “Unfortunately, even after they graduate from university, most people cannot speak English well” (Chuang, 2001). Is it possible that a simple additional tool added to the skills and training of Taiwan’s already capable teachers could help them do a more effective job of improving students’ comprehension and speaking of English in their daily lives?

Oscar Chung wrote an article in the “Taiwan Review” called ‘Learning to Communicate.’ (December 1, 2000) that discussed the problems with trying to teach English effectively. He said something needed to be done to improve instruction. Taiwanese educator, Jerome Su, was interviewed in that article. Su, the founder of Bookman Books and B. K. Norton, teaches translation skills to university students. He intuitively recognized that storytelling is one of the best ways to introduce listeners to good books. He found that students who are taught in a traditional manner have more difficulty speaking and translating English than individuals who have also experienced the teaching of English through storytelling.

Su was the first to engage my services to teach educators in Taiwan how to tell stories and how to use stories to improve teaching English as a foreign language. I have now been to Taiwan seven times expressly for the purpose of working with educators and schools (both public and private) to help them implement the use of storytelling as a means of helping teachers and students improve their oral comprehension, conversational speaking and basic understanding of English. It is natural that I would believe that storytelling is an effective teaching tool. It is reasonable however, that others question my beliefs. Therefore, I have used the format of this paper to first-summarize education research that supports the use of promoting storytelling as an effective tool for teaching in general. It is now my intent to expand on the theme of storytelling as it relates to teaching English as a foreign language.

### **Using Storytelling to Teach English as a Foreign Language**

A valuable look at the use of storytelling to teach English as a second language was provided by educator, Rex Tanimoto in Osaka, Japan. Tanimoto (1992) says he learned by accident the positive effects of using storytelling to help teach English to his university freshmen composition students. Tanimoto found links connecting storytelling to motivation and learning English in his classes. Stories were told in English as a warm-up activity at the beginning of class. Other than the auditory experience of listening daily to the stories, no other work or assignments involved storytelling. Still, reports by 48 out of 48 of his students demonstrated that they all favored storytelling as a method of helping them learn English. His research suggested that:

### **There is a positive relationship between storytelling and writing**

Students in Tanimoto’s study found that learning English was normally very boring. Hearing stories in English helped them increase their listening abilities and improved their comprehension of English. They wrote, “Don’t quit telling stories,” in their essays. They said the storytelling made them happy and that they were able to better understand English expressions. Students believed their listening improved and that the context of the stories and the gestures during the delivery helped improve their comprehension. The stories helped them learn new vocabulary and new expressions.

### **There is a positive change in students' attitudes towards learning English**

Tanimoto's students reported that they enjoyed studying English more through the use of storytelling. Prior to hearing stories as a part of the curriculum they felt English was only the study of grammar. Most of them had studied the language for seven or more years, and many reported hating it! Their study had been used for the purpose of passing examinations at the university level. There had been little joy in their work. The use of stories did more than relieve the boredom. Students reported wanting to model the use of telling stories in the classroom. "I want to teach like you," said one student. "I want students to enjoy my class." Another person reported wanting to drop out of university prior to the time when Tanimoto began telling stories. It was amazing to me that simple stories could have such a positive impact on the attitudes of 48 college age learners. Shamali, an English language instructor at Dhofar University in Oman, supports this. "A teacher of English needs to be imaginative, creative and innovative and telling stories in English Language Teaching (ELT) can surely assist to make the process of teaching and learning more motivating, interesting, interactive and effective" (Shamali, 2011). When teachers can capture students' enthusiasm by presenting appropriate lessons (I say this should include storytelling.), teachers can build a foundation for a life-long interest in the English language (Dunn, 1990).

### **Storytelling helps students learn to concentrate more on the speaker**

Tanimoto's students recalled having difficulty concentrating on the speaker before storytelling became part of the content. An honest comment by one student focused on concentration. "When I listen to your stories, I concentrate on this class. If you don't tell stories, this class will be boring, and then I might sleep." A second student talked of being fatigued and of how the use of stories allowed him to concentrate on the teacher's words and to make more of an effort to learn. It is hard for students to understand the use of English in a typical news report, but the slower paced telling of stories made English easier to understand. This helped them focus in class. Students commented that as they understood simple stories, they looked forward to hearing more difficult ones. They gained confidence in their ability to focus and understand.

### **Storytelling helps students recall and reflect on past experiences in their own culture and to learn about other cultures**

Comments like "When you told about \_\_\_ I remembered my life in my hometown... I could feel the tenderness, the strength, the generosity of my mother. Above all, I could feel your stories in English, and I had a very good time." Another said that the storytelling helped them think back about their parents, friends and a girl he loved. Listening to stories seemed to make the students think more deeply. Storytelling also taught students how to "read between the lines" when hearing or reading materials in English.

### **Storytelling caters to students interests and enhances their motivation**

I have had the great pleasure of talking with many of my students years after I had them in the classroom. Karen H., a former student of mine, recently wrote me from the Cape Verde Islands off the west coast of Africa. She works as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching and caring for groups of African orphans on a small island. She is using storytelling to help them learn English. Why? Because she recalled hearing me tell stories to her as a nine year old girl almost 30 years ago. Stories motivated Karen to learn in school. Now she is using stories to motivate her students to learn English as a Foreign Language.

Amy V. is another of my former students. She teaches children on the island nation called Madagascar. As with Karen, Amy successfully uses stories and storytelling to teach African

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children how to speak English. Comments from my two former students in their emails to me sound like the words that Tanimoto's students wrote in their essays to him. They say the stories help students relax. Stories give them special energy that helps them learn. They call the content of stories heartwarming and say that storytelling makes the learning of English seem friendlier. These all serve as powerful reasons for using storytelling as a primary teaching method when teaching English as a foreign language.

### **Using Storytelling to Help Teach EFL Makes Sense**

Gail de Vos (1991) listed nine reasons for telling stories to children that were originally written by Andrus and printed in *Library Journal* in 1913. It is my opinion that the reasons also support using storytelling in the teaching of English as a foreign language to students of all ages. The reasons are listed below (with my added notes in parenthesis):

- 1) to give familiarity with good English
- 2) to cultivate the power of sustained attention (*needed in the learning of a new language*)
- 3) to establish a friendly relationship between child (*student*) and storyteller (*teacher*)
- 4) to cultivate a literary standard by which a child (*student*) may judge other stories
- 5) to develop a right sense of humor (*understand humor in spoken and written English*)
- 6) to cultivate imagination (*breaking the mold of thinking only in a native language*)
- 7) to develop sympathy – an outcome of imagination
- 8) to give a clear impression of moral truth (*as perceived by the western world*)
- 9) to lead to books (*books written in English*)

A number of professionals and educators support the use of storytelling for teaching and learning purposes. Among them are Chambers (1970); Baker and Greene (1987); Hendrickson (1992); Wasson-Ellam (1992); Freire (1996); Bruner (1996); McQuillan & Tse (1998); and Jianging (2007). "Language educators should not overlook the significance of storytelling for language learning, especially foreign language learning" (Tsou, 2003).

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