

HOW TO USE TALES FOR THE TEACHING OF VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR IN A PRIMARY EDUCATION ENGLISH CLASS¹

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We all need stories for our minds just as much as we need food for our bodies.

Andrew Wright.

ABSTRACT. *This paper examines the use of tales in Primary Education English classes. Its use is important, taking into account the students' characteristics at that age and in the formal context of the classroom. It suggests the teacher how to choose tales in terms of students' age, materials to work with, lay out of the class and so on. It also provides the teacher with a number of activities based on the tale with which to use the meaningful learning. This is the way to make them practice vocabulary and grammar in the meaningful context provided with the story. In addition to this, children do the activities autonomously so that cooperation among pupils is promoted and children learn to learn for themselves.*

KEY WORDS. *Tales, meaningful learning, vocabulary and grammar.*

RESUMEN. *Este artículo examina la importancia del uso de los cuentos en una clase de inglés en educación primaria. Justifica su utilización teniendo en cuenta las características de los alumnos a esa edad y en el contexto formal del aula. Sugiere al docente cómo trabajar los cuentos con un número de actividades basadas en el mismo y en las que se incide en el aprendizaje significativo. De esta forma, los alumnos practican vocabulario y gramática en el contexto significativo de la narración. Además los niños harán las actividades de forma autónoma, por lo que se promociona la cooperación entre los alumnos y el aprendizaje autónomo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Cuentos, aprendizaje significativo, vocabulario y gramática.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Telling stories has long been recognised as a powerful means of human communication. Narrative is probably the most common way of organising experience. Because of this, even very young children will know, implicitly, a lot about stories, what to expect, how to respond. This is an ability that the school should be able to draw on and build upon (Howe & Johnson 1992: 3). This paper will give reasons for using children's stories in a class of English, what is the role of stories in English classes, how to select and use those stories and, finally, which story-based activities can be proposed for Primary School Education.

2. REASONS FOR USING CHILDREN'S STORIES

Children enjoy listening to stories in their mother tongue. Storytelling is an ideal introduction to foreign languages as stories provide a familiar context for the child. Moreover, if teachers want to attract children's attention they must propose a motivating activity such as story telling. Children start enjoying literature from an early age by the teacher's use of extensive reading of stories. They develop their literary competence –a combination of linguistic, socio-cultural, historical and semiotic awareness (Brumfit & Carter 1986: 18). Literature, in general, allows pupils to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own. Consequently, children learn to respect other cultures and to be involved in them. In addition to this, storytelling provides contexts for talking, listening, reading, writing and other activities such as dance and drama.

According to several critics², there are a number of reasons why teachers use children's stories:

- Stories are motivating and fun creating a desire to communicate. They develop positive attitudes and help children to keep on learning. Positive affective factors facilitate acquiring a second language. Children will learn better if they have a positive attitude towards what they are doing.
- Stories exercise the imagination. Children imagine sceneries, characters and so on about a story. For example, if they become personally involved in a story they can identify with some characters.
- Stories provide a rich resource for education about human societies, offering insights into life in many different communities and into complex cultures.
- Stories are a useful tool in linking fantasy and imagination with the child's real world. So children can make sense of their everyday life. Stories help children to understand the world and to share it with others. "Nine to twelve -year-olds are developing their ability to appreciate other viewpoints. At this age stories about family and friends should not only reassure children about themselves but also provide them with new insights into how other families and children cope with various situations. Children at this age enjoy stories that extend their

experiences (Brumfit, Moon and Tongue 1991: 185). On the other hand, there is a need to make language learning easier for young children by relating it to their experience in everyday life.

- Literature has a social and emotional value, which is a vital part of its role in the development of children's language learning skills and literacy. Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience. Storytelling provokes a response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation, which can encourage the child's social and emotional development. In addition, there is always a sort of interaction between the reader and his listeners so s/he can ask for the listeners' collaboration to say what happens next, for instance. Listening to stories is a natural way of acquiring language. The child learns to deduce what happens next, to deduce the meaning of words from the context or visual aids. This helps to build their confidence. Moreover, children need to develop a series of characteristics to enable them to fit into the society they live in, to become aware of themselves in relation to others, to share and co-operate. They can achieve this by listening to stories. For instance, children learn about other experiences and they can compare those experiences with theirs.
- Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being overtly reinforced. Little by little they make sense out of the listening. In addition, repetition also encourages participation in the narrative, thereby providing a type of pattern practice in a meaningful context.
- Telling stories is an example of input –input of language through listening and reading– for the child to activate and develop his own learning mechanisms. Moreover, the process of making input comprehensible is an active constructive process (Genesee 1994: 53). An important condition for language acquisition to occur is that the student understands input language that contains a structure 'a bit beyond' his/her current level of competence. So they can understand most of it but still be challenged to make progress (Brown 1987: 188). Neither should the input be so easy as to make the learner become bored because there is nothing new for him/her. Stories introduce some new vocabulary and sentence structures. In general terms, children acquire first the general semantic characteristics of words (Galeote 2002: 167). Their meanings are contextualized and can be inferred from the pictures or teacher's gestures. Moreover, the teacher usually reads slowly and gives them time to think about the meaning and look at the pictures. Many traditional stories abound with powerfully repeated phrases such as *Goldilocks* – Who's been sitting on my chair? And who's broken it? Added baby bear... Who's been sleeping in my bed? Baby bear adds: and who's still sleeping there now?– These examples can be used as an almost subliminal grammar input (Morgan and Rinvolucri 1983: 2).
On the other hand, story telling is an activity to develop the child's understanding as he is in the silent period –taking place in the first stages of

second language acquisition– in which he is just receiving and making sense of input but he is not able to speak in the second language properly.

- In Primary Education the children’s capacity for conscious learning of forms and grammatical patterns is still relatively undeveloped. López Rodríguez (2003: 27) argues that it is often forgotten that in primary education understanding is mainly semantic. Not only does listening to stories allow the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary, but also sentence structures and English pronunciation in meaningful contexts by means of pictures, gestures, intonation, facial expression and so on. Children acquire them unconsciously as they listen to the story for the meaning –in order to know what is going on. Consequently, children must be active participants in the construction of meaning. Moreover, it is easier for them to remember the vocabulary and grammar as they were given in a meaningful and motivating context.
- Listening to stories develops the child’s listening and concentration skills via: visual clues (pictures) or general knowledge. In this way school kids can understand the story and they are motivated for language learning. The teacher can maintain their attention for example by asking them to listen for the gist –that is, looking for the plot of the story–. So the pupil gets the idea that s/he can understand the text without knowing the meaning of every word. Children need a lot of practice in order to understand a tale. Moreover, the use of these stories, for example, which usually contains a lot of direct speech, helps the learner develop a sense of how intonation is used to express attitudes and feelings.
- Stories can be used to reinforce conceptual development in children (colour, shape, time, size etc.).
- Stories are a way of getting children to learn for themselves. That is the case with the following:
 - Reinforcing thinking strategies (comparing, classifying, predicting, planning etc.)
 - Developing strategies for learning English (guessing the meaning of new words, training the memory etc.)
 - Developing study skills (understanding and interpreting charts and graphs, organizing work and so on.).
- Storytelling is a powerful way of helping pupils to learn in all areas of the curriculum. According to Howe and Johnson (1992: 5), the reason is that narrative is a universal way of organising events and ideas. Stories can be chosen to consolidate learning in school subjects across the curriculum, which is appropriate to the pupil’s cognitive level. This is true with:
 - Mathematics (telling the time, numbers and measuring).
 - Science (animals, outer space, flowers, how seeds grow. . .).
 - History (pre-historic animals, traditional holidays, understanding the passing of time) (in Jane Cross and others, 1994).

- Geography and the environment (shopping and shops in the local area, neighbourhood parks) (in Jane Cross and others, 1994).
- Art and craft (drawing, making masks, making puppets).
- Music and drama (singing songs, playing instruments, miming, dramatizations).

Storybooks can be used to provide variety and extra language practice. However, the teacher must not use story telling only for teaching grammar and vocabulary because children would not be so motivated and ready to listen to a story.

3. IS THERE ROOM FOR STORIES IN THE PRIMARY EDUCATION ENGLISH CLASS?

Several studies³ have pointed out an array of children's features, which must be taken into account when teaching English as a foreign language.

As Agustín and Barreras (2007: 10) assert, there are many factors influencing children's maturity such as culture, environment, sex (Philips 1993: 5) and experiences. According to Piaget, children are situated in a *concrete operational stage* (Mounoud 2001: 62). This means that they can understand concrete aspects and topics rather than abstract ones (Williams and Burden 1999: 31). A tale helps the teacher to contextualize vocabulary and makes it easier to understand and learn. Children see the illustrations of the book or watch the teacher performing an action. Consequently, they can easily understand the meaning of new words whose referents are concrete.

Bloor (1991: 129) contends that children learn a foreign language better in situations in which attention is focused on meaning rather than on language itself. That happens with a tale. It attracts children's attention and they understand the plot of the story. The vocabulary is not abstract but concrete. Moreover, it is useful because children can understand the new vocabulary without any translations into their mother tongue. In this sense, Halliwell (1994: 3) stands out that young children are good at interpreting the general meaning. Teachers can make use of voice intonation or body language to facilitate the process of meaning understanding. This happens when telling a story.

In addition to this, it is important to remember the relevance given to personal experiences by children of this age. This justifies the use of topics they like, such as tales, in order to motivate them. Consequently, depending on those stories students will study and reinforce several semantic fields and grammar. On the other hand, this has to do with the use of meaningful learning, as the teacher uses their previous learning of vocabulary, grammar, experiences and tales already known in English and Spanish so as to widen their level of English and so as to introduce new information. In this way, story telling uses "meaningful learning" as children learn new vocabulary and grammatical structures from vocabulary and grammatical structures already known and in the meaningful context provided by the story. Zanón (1992: 100-101) thinks that the use of meaningful learning in the teaching of English is necessary. According to him, if

meaningful learning is used, once the activity is over, the new knowledge will be stored in long-term memory.

In relation to the social aspect, the teacher knows that most children like forming groups and taking part in team activities. Consequently, students can have dialogues or dramatizations based on tales. This gives them the opportunity of speaking with each other in English.

In general terms, it is admitted that most children are uninhibited. They do not behave like shy teenagers do. A young child can learn fluent and natural English without strain, embarrassment or, even effort. Young children do not usually get embarrassed. They like getting involved. They are curious. They behave in a very extrovert way. This feature helps them learn more rapidly and more successfully; it follows that it is easier for them to start speaking in English. Lacking the inhibitions of their teenage years, they have more opportunities to practice their English, to learn from their mistakes and to obtain more input. These young students like role-playing and dramatizations, even when performing them in English, in front of the rest of their classmates. Tales give them great opportunities.

Moreover, children of this age start overcoming their self-centred stage. They are interested about others and in relating themselves to other classmates. This helps the teacher to introduce students to a new culture.

The capacity of communicating in a foreign language is seen as an important aspect to help gain contact with other cultures. In this sense, Miquel Siguan asserts:

La relación entre una lengua y la sociedad o el pueblo que la habla no se limitaba la literatura producida por esa sociedad; en realidad es toda la cultura de un pueblo la que de alguna manera se expresa verbalmente. Por tanto, adquirir una lengua extranjera y profundizar en ella implica familiarizarse con la cultura del pueblo que la habla. (Siguán 1996: 130).

Using stories is interesting as children become familiarized with other cultures and social contexts different from their own. They can find out the typical holidays in Great Britain and their traditions. School children will understand that there are different viewpoints and so they become more tolerant. In Spain children are quite young when they start to learn English at school. They are about eight years old. Knowing about a different culture helps them to overcome their self-centered stage. They compare their culture with a different one. Consequently, they realize that there are other cultures and theirs is not always the best.

García Arrezas and others (1994: 280) argue that acquiring a second language consolidates the first one. Besides, learning a second language is not harmful for the learning of their native language, as they already know how to speak Spanish correctly and have already started to write in Spanish. That is why the most emphasized skills to work on are the oral skills in Primary Education. One cannot ask a child to write in a second language when they have not achieved that skill in their first language. Telling

stories develops the oral skills. Pupils have to listen to a story and understand it. In addition, they have to do several activities based on the story once it is finished. Then children have to speak about the story and so, practice the oral skill. As pupils are very young when they first contact the English language initial teaching must be done in a positive and attractive way. Teachers have to use activities appealing to the school children, such as story telling. It belongs to the field of the pupil's interests. The new information they receive is contextualized and, therefore, they can understand the story.

When children start learning another language for the first time they receive more input than they produce output. The reason is that learners go through the silent period, that is they understand the input received but are not able to speak at that moment. In general, people process the input before they are able to speak in the second language. Consequently, teachers know that they are helping the students to go through the silent period. They receive input orally and understand it before being able to produce output. Moreover, as the pupils are young teachers must use something appealing to them.

Pupils understand a short oral text related to their interests. They produce both brief oral and written texts when they do the story-based activities. They can read brief texts such as the chants or rhymes in the story or the activities based on it. They recognize the communicative value of the foreign languages with their understanding and respect to the target language, the target language community and its culture. Children understand the story, learn something about the target language culture and respect it. They learn to develop their communicative competence as well as the linguistic and non-linguistic conventions used by the target language speakers in their dramatizations based on the story. School children also start relating the pronunciation and the written word little by little. They do this by means of listening to stories and recognising the written word accompanied by illustrations when they pick up storybooks in the book corner.

Moreover, one knows the importance of having a relaxed atmosphere in class, which is easily achieved by story telling. Children know they are going to enjoy themselves, besides, "relaxed students learn more easily" (Dulay 1982: 266). These ludic activities create a good environment in the class. In this sense, we can stand out Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. He sees the affective filter as being the emotional disposition of an individual, which acts upon the learning processes. A high affective filter causes the learner to be a relatively inefficient learner. This is likely to result from anxieties, disturbances or inhibitions. A low affective filter, which may result from feelings of relaxation, well-being or success, maximises learning efficiency (Ellis 1985: 263). In this good atmosphere the affective filter is down and the acquisition of the new language is easier. In addition to this, all learners are involved and their work is valued, which makes them feel comfortable. In this sense, Broughton et al. (1980: 170) assert that no child should feel pressed to learn. Moreover, children will learn more if they have a positive attitude towards what they are doing and if they want to do it (Williams 1991: 204).

It is important to develop the four skills in an integrated way, although the teacher of English has to stress the oral skills. Again this is what story telling achieves in the

story-based activities. Children have to write invitations, to speak in a dramatization, to listen to a story or to look up words in a picture dictionary. Children can produce things or dip into other subjects. Consequently, the English teacher can relate it to other subjects that pupils are learning.

Using story telling is an attractive activity for the children, as they usually like story telling. The teacher has to select different tales depending on his pupils' features and to grade the different activities based on the story. S/He must also help the school children to be involved in the story, acquire the second language and the second language culture. Also s/he must help them to do the activities autonomously so that co-operation and pupil-to-pupil interaction are promoted. All these activities are achieved using story telling.

The teacher has to grade the stories, objectives and types of activities depending on the cycle and the course the children are in. In general terms, there are a number of objectives for Spanish Primary Education that story telling fulfils.

4. SELECTION OF STORYBOOKS

Stories must be chosen depending on the age and the linguistic level of the pupils. Moreover, there must be a particular purpose when selecting a story so that it will carry the ideas the teacher wishes to focus on. Another important question to think about is whether to use simplified or authentic storybooks for the children. There are many authentic storybooks written for English-speaking children, which are also suitable for those learning English. Moreover, authentic storybooks are full of examples of real language although simplified stories can be easier for the Primary Education pupils (Ellis and Brewster 1991: 9).

Children sometimes already know the story the teacher is going to tell. Genesee (1994: 147) argues that choosing stories, which are culturally familiar, may be especially helpful because prior knowledge of characters and plots may make the stories potentially more comprehensible to the learners than unfamiliar ones. If a child already knows the story in his first language he will be able to follow the English version of the same story. S/He already knows the plot and the teacher can facilitate his/her understanding by using body language or using pictures. Stories can be chosen to support a cross-curricular teaching approach. They can develop ideas in a variety of different subject areas. They can explain concepts by providing illustrations of practical applications (Bennett and others 1991: 6).

The teacher has to grade the input the children receive by means of stories from less complicated to more complicated ones. If the story is very difficult to understand the teacher can modify or simplify it. Ellis and Brewster (1991: 18-19) give some possible solutions. The teacher must check the clarity of the text and the vocabulary. Consequently, it may be necessary to substitute familiar words or expressions for more unfamiliar ones. That is usually the case with idioms. They are difficult to understand for children so the teacher will change them for easier words. It is also interesting to

check the word order, as it can be difficult to understand. The teacher can sometimes perform actions to make the meaning more explicit. S/He will also check the grammar. It is better to avoid too many tenses or complicated structures. The teacher must check the sentence (its length and complexity), as it is easier to understand a short sentence. So a long sentence can be split into two sentences. Moreover, the teacher must also check how ideas are explained so that children understand them. If the number of ideas is excessive the teacher can also leave out some of them to reduce the length of the story without spoiling the overall effect. Apart from this, the storybook selected needs a good storyline, in which the children will become actively involved since they can anticipate what may happen next. The story must not only be easy to understand but also appealing to the children.

Another important feature to take into account is the quality of illustrations. They appeal to the young readers and help them to understand the meaning of the story.

Illustrations are crucial to books for young learners, particularly for those for whom English is a second language... should support the text and stimulate the reader. Good illustrations will enhance children's understanding of the text, and promote lots of exciting discussions (Brumfit, Moon and Tongue 1991: 185).

Children like stories full of illustrations in bright colours and with interesting characters. They make the meaning of the story easier to understand than a story without any illustration at all. A story with illustrations is accessible, useful and relevant for children learning English because they can understand the story on their own.

In selecting stories for the classroom Morgan and Rinvulcri (1983: 9) consider two main criteria: if it is a story that the teacher would enjoy telling and if it is a story that pupils might find entertaining. Ellis and Brewster (1991: 12) also give criteria for selecting storybooks. For them there are several points of view: The first is linguistic (that is the difficulty of structures and vocabulary, the facility of pronunciation given by rhymes, rhythms or intonations and the content, if it is relevant and interesting). The second is psychological (if there are attractive visuals, if the story encourages participation by using repetitions or prediction, if it is motivating and if it arouses curiosity). Finally, the third one is cultural (if the story creates positive attitudes towards the target language and the target culture and, finally, if the language is authentic and appropriate for the children). Andrew Wright (1996: 15) has got similar ideas about choosing a story as well. He argues that the story chosen must be appealing to the children. They must like it. The story must be suitable to the students' age, linguistic level and maturity. The school children must understand it in order to enjoy it. The story gives them the opportunity to listen to English. However, neither should the paragraphs be too long or too descriptive. Children can get lost with those paragraphs. It is easier for them to understand characters speaking because their conversation is more concrete and closer to the pupil. In addition, the story must be appropriate for the student and for

the ideas the teacher wishes to focus on. Finally, it is better if the school children find the storyteller interesting.

The teacher must pay attention to selecting the appropriate time and place for story telling, making sure that there will not be any interruptions, choosing the right story and creating the right mood.

5. USING STORIES

Reading stories aloud attracts the children's interest in language and books. It exposes them to good models of R.P. English. Storytelling is a positive motivating activity, which helps them to develop the habit of reading from a very young age. It helps children to become better readers, writers and users of language in the future.

The teacher must think about whether reading the story him/herself or using a CD or a DVD. Both a CD and a DVD provide variety by allowing pupils to hear English spoken with another accent. The voice in the CD and the DVD provide a constant model. Moreover, some recordings contain amusing sound effects and there are also adapted voices for different characters, intonation patterns and so on (Ellis and Brewster 1991: 32). A DVD also provides the movements of the characters and the sceneries giving clues to understand what is going on. However, the teacher's reading becomes more flexible for the children. They are going to share something. The teacher can stop and ask pupils questions. They can relate the story to their own experiences by means of these questions. This is not possible with the CD or the DVD. Consequently, it is considered better to use teacher story telling than using the CD or the DVD.

Many critics⁴ claim that the environment, which is created in class for the story telling, is important. It must be relaxing. The layout of the classroom can also help to acquire this relaxation in the class. Just asking the pupils to sit in a circle on the floor can change it. Children understand it is going to be a different kind of activity. The teacher attracts their attention. Both the teacher and the pupils are going to share something special. If the school children change the layout of the class it is also a way of sending a message that the story telling time is fun and relaxing. Children must feel comfortable in class while listening to stories. If they are relaxed and comfortable, then they are more open to what they are about to hear. There are different ways to achieve it, for instance: playing music, showing a puppet, wearing a hat or just showing the plastic bag where the teacher has got all his/her stories. According to Vale and Feunteun (1995: 21),

It has been often demonstrated that a relaxed learning environment supports the learning process. Moreover, when learners feel relaxed and at ease with their classmates, it encourages a wider sharing and exchange of ideas. In this atmosphere, learners gain the confidence to lend and receive support from peers, to take risks with new language in front of the class, and to relate to the teacher without fear of possible ridicule and correction. Furthermore, a supportive atmosphere may lead towards more co-operative work among the pupils.

In this kind of atmosphere the child's affective filter is lowered and acquisition of the second language takes place more easily. Children feel secure and happy in the classroom. So they become independent in the acquisition of the second language. Krashen applied several principles to the field of second language teaching. One of the concepts he developed was that of the 'affective filter.' He sees the affective filter as being the emotional disposition of an individual, which acts upon the learning processes. A high affective filter causes the learner to be a relatively inefficient learner. This is likely to result from anxieties, disturbances or inhibitions. A low affective filter, which may result from feelings of relaxation, well-being or success, maximises learning efficiency (Ellis 1985: 263). Consequently, using story telling produces a low affective filter in participants because children feel relaxed in these circumstances. The teacher plays an important role in developing a classroom environment, which encourages talk. This can encourage children to value each other. Moreover, this freedom also allows the teacher to discover what the children think (Bennett and others 1991: 10).

The teacher reads a story, which the children do not have direct access to. Therefore, there is an element of surprise for the children, as they do not know what is going to happen in the story. The teacher attracts their attention in this way. Once the story is finished the teacher can put several copies of the story in the classroom book corner so that the children can look at them in their own time. This provides a natural introduction to the written word in English and to developing reading skills.

When the teacher reads the story s/he must take into account that the child's level of concentration might not be very high. S/He can read the whole story or part of it, depending on the length of the story, in a session. S/He can also read the story several times in different sessions. The repetition of the story recycles language previously introduced and pupils learn to predict and participate in the story. This builds up their confidence (Wright 1996: 13). Their confidence grows as they realize that they can remember more items of vocabulary and sentences, so they can repeat them along with the teacher. Besides, taking part in story telling becomes a kind of game activity.

The introduction of the story is one of the most important elements in story telling. Depending on how the introduction is presented, the story might be a success or not. Vale and Feunteun (1995: 82) argue, "reading is a quest for meaning which requires children to be active participants in the construction of meaning." The teacher must help them by giving the tools to construct the meaning of the story before and while reading the story. Many critics⁵ agree on this issue and give pieces of advice for this moment. Moreover, the pupil's enjoyment will increase enormously if the teacher ensures that their understanding is supported in several ways.

- Relating the literary text to the school children's personal world by asking questions. Children relate the theme to their knowledge and understanding (Carter and Long 1991: 45).
- Setting the scene by drawing upon the children's own experiences or their knowledge about the subject and language used in the story.

- Providing a context for the story and introducing the main characters. This helps pupils to feel involved and to link their experiences with that of the story to set the scene.
- Either providing a brief outline of the main storyline beforehand or reminding pupils of what has happened so far in the story.
- Explaining keywords, expressions or cultural information, even in their mother tongue if necessary.
- The teacher can elicit key vocabulary and phrases and involve the pupils in predicting what will happen next in a story.
- The teacher can also provide visual support with realia, published materials, the teacher's and pupils' drawings on the blackboard, cut out figures, masks, puppets or the illustrations in the story in order to make the story understandable.

Reading like this is seen by many teachers as the most reliable path to the development of reading skills (Brumfit, Moon and Tongue 1991: 178). For this reason it is interesting for the teacher to build up a resource bank of potential stories across a number of topics to use any one for story telling. Also having a repertoire of ideas and a collection of prototype materials to support the narrative of the stories helps the teacher to tell the story (Kennedy and Jarvis 1991: 57).

On the other hand, a teacher's story telling skills are very important. There are a number of techniques s/he can use in order to make the experience more enjoyable and successful. The teacher must notice if the pupils are accustomed to story telling or not. If they are unfamiliar with story telling the teacher should begin with short sessions that do not demand too much from them and over-extend their concentration span which is quite short. Many critics⁶ agree on the importance of story telling and give some ideas in order to improve the story telling techniques.

- If possible, the children should sit on the floor around the teacher. This is a way of attracting pupils' attention. They are going to do something different to what they usually do. That is why they sit on the floor. Then the teacher makes sure everyone can see both his/her face and the illustrations in the story.
- The teacher reads slowly and clearly, giving his/her pupils time to think, ask questions, look at pictures and make comments.
- The teacher sometimes makes comments about the illustrations as well. When s/he says a word s/he also points to the illustration at the same time to make him/herself understood. Besides, s/he involves his/her pupils by asking them to point to the illustration and so on.
- The teacher encourages his/her pupils to take part in the story telling by repeating key vocabulary items and phrases. He pauses and looks at them and puts his/her hand to his/her ear to indicate that s/he is waiting for them to join in.
- Using gestures, body language, facial expressions, varied intonation, pace and tone, disguising his/her voice for different characters as much as possible to help convey meaning. This keeps the pupils' attention and stresses important words.

S/He can involve his/her learners by asking them what is going to happen next while s/he is making the gesture or miming to let them know. So the teacher holds their attention.

- S/He can also use the CD and the DVD to allow pupils to listen to the story or watch it, whenever they wish and to reinforce the learning of slower pupils.

The teacher can also assess his/her own skills as a storyteller in a number of different ways.

- Using CDs, when possible, to provide him/her with a model he can copy and try to rehearse with.
- Familiarizing with the book, the story and illustrations. Deciding where to stop his story telling in order to invite the pupils to join in, which vocabulary to stress and so on.
- Making the story come alive through the use of intonation, gesture, body language and so on.

A classroom needs to have a class library in which children have regular and frequent access. Children learn a lot about language, literacy and books when they are allowed a daily time for free-choice reading. Consequently, the teacher should make books available to the children. This will provide them with an introduction to the written word in English. Children can make the connection between what they have heard and memorized and what they see written and illustrated on the page. Several critics⁷ emphasize the importance of having a book corner in a classroom.

The book corner of the classroom can offer not only stories but also CDs and DVDs with the recording of the stories so that the students can listen to them and watch them at home. This happens because the teacher allows pupils to have open access to the book corner. The book corner can consist of a bookcase or shelving at its best. A table or cardboard boxes covered in coloured paper can also be used to display the material. It is better if children can easily see the covers of the books. This is more attractive and makes selection much easier. Moreover, this book corner can be decorated with children's drawings, posters or collages, which have been inspired by stories, read to them in class. There are also other things such as flowers, plants, a carpet, cushions that make the book corner cosier, attractive and interesting. This is a way of drawing the pupil's attention towards the book corner.

The teacher should involve his/her pupils as much as possible in the organization of the book corner. This is important because looking after the book corner encourages children to take responsibility for the care of the books. In addition to this, if pupils may borrow the books the teacher will need to devise a lending system. In the first weeks the teacher has to act as a librarian to show the children how to organize a library. Then he can appoint two children as librarians each month. According to Dunn (1989: 92), the librarian's duties are

- To keep the library running efficiently.

- To check that borrowed books are returned.
- To make pupils aware of new books.
- To help teachers to process new books.

Children should have free access to storybooks and they become more responsible as the pupils take care of the storybooks themselves.

6. STORY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Many authors^s agree on the fact that teachers can make use of stories providing different activities for pupils, although they must be chosen depending on the pupil's age, their level of English and cognitive development.

Story based activities are ways of achieving meaningful learning. The knowledge that the child already has acts as a sort of bridge for the knowledge s/he will learn. Brown understands meaningful learning in these terms.

It may be described as a process of relating and anchoring new material to relevant established entities in cognitive structure. As new materials enter the cognitive field; it interacts with and is appropriately subsumed under in a more inclusive conceptual system. (Brown 1987: 66)

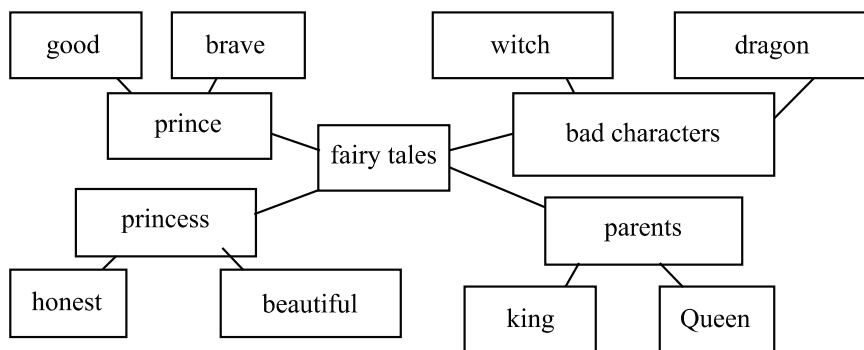
Storytelling achieves this kind of meaningful learning. Stories introduce new vocabulary and grammar to those already known by the pupils. In addition, the teacher provides them with activities based on the story in which they practice the same kind of learning. For instance, school pupils should practice some new grammatical rules along with some that are already known. These activities usually integrate various aspects of language learning. Pupils consolidate the new ones by doing those activities. Moreover, as these activities are related to their field of interests the teacher involves them in story telling. Children should be motivated to do the activities and, consequently, to learn.

There are different types of activities based on stories. The teacher can play with his way of telling the story to make the pupils take part in the narrative. Howe and Johnson (1992: 46) propose several, for instance, the teacher tells the beginning, middle and end of a story to three different groups of pupils, who then join into groups of three to piece together the whole story. The teacher can also tell two different stories to two different classes. Consequently, the pupils from the two classes come together in pairs (one from each class) and swap stories. However, most of the activities can be classified into three different tasks according to Villaroel (1997). They are pre-listening stage (that is, tasks performed before listening), while-listening stage (that is, those performed during story telling) and, finally, post-listening stage (that is, the activities done after the listening).

Pre-listening stage tasks: They are an introduction and an orientation to the text. The teacher asks about the pupils' previous knowledge of the story. By doing this, the teacher prepares the class to relate the story to their previous experiences. Consequently,

the understanding is easier and pupils achieve meaningful learning. These activities are very important because they make children familiar with the content of the story. Consequently, they will know something about the story and the language used. Children will be involved in the story so they have a reason to listen to it. Children will learn better if they have a positive attitude towards what they are doing and if they want to do it (Brumfit, Moon and Tongue 1991: 207). They can also learn some key vocabulary or grammatical items by means of images, miming or objects or, if necessary, in their first language. Here are some examples:

- The teacher can ask the children if they know what a fairy tale is and what kind of characters appear in them. The teacher asks the children to brainstorm vocabulary related to fairy tales. Later s/he can use a semantic mapping, as in the following example.



- The pupils can answer this even in their own language. Meanwhile the teacher writes the information down on the blackboard as in the example⁹. In this way pupils work with word field diagrams and visualize the connection between the words while learning them. Children predict some vocabulary that they think it might appear in the story. The teacher can also introduce and revise some of the key language items in the story.
- Children speak about what they already know in relation to the story. So they relate the story to their own experiences.
- The teacher reminds his/her class of other stories with a similar content. S/He also reminds pupils of any related concepts or aspects in the curriculum covered in other classes.
- School children predict what is going to happen by looking at the cover of the book. They can also think of how many characters are going to be in the story. They can say in which colours they are dressed, if they are tall or short etc.

- The teacher shows different objects, which later are connected with the story. Children understand their meaning and will be able to recognize them in the story.
- The teacher provides a summary of the main story line, if it is necessary in the pupils' mother tongue, especially for those more difficult stories. The children themselves can also do it if it is not too difficult.
- Another good idea is informing pupils about what they will work on after they have listened to the story. This makes story telling to more meaningful and motivating. The teacher can tell them that they are going to make some masks and puppets or they are going to perform a dramatization based on the story.

The teacher prepares his/her pupils to what they are going to listen to. Children are motivated and ready to listen to the story.

While listening stage tasks: Children's concentration span is not too long so questions and activities make children understand the story and focus on it. The teacher draws their attention and maintains it. School children also feel involved in the story and, consequently, motivated. Moreover, Wood (in Brumfit, Moon & Tongue 1991: 8) argues that activities or interactions are more likely to enable a child to memorise items since they are more meaningful to him/her. Consequently, apart from helping pupils to concentrate on the story the teacher is also helping them to remember some items of vocabulary. Activities of this kind are the following:

- Children can number the characters while listening, so they also practice the numbers in English.
- Children show their understanding by performing an action or by showing a flashcard of the character that is speaking at that moment.
- School children choose different pictures of characters or of the story itself, for instance, depending on what the teacher is narrating.
- Pupils can decide which parts they like most or least.
- The class can join in the narration by repeating a well-known rhyme, a word or a whole phrase. That is the case in the giant's chant from *Jack and the Beanstalk*:

Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman,
Be he alive or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

- School children can sing a song related to the story. The themes developed in stories are often found in several songs and rhymes for pupils. They practise the rhythm and intonation of the English language through imitation and repetition (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 1992: 173).
- Children are asked to predict a word or phrase with the teacher's help. For instance, the teacher can help them by showing illustrations, miming an action

- or by making noises. The teacher can also stop their narration and ask the pupils to predict what will happen next or what event they would prefer in the story.
- Teachers may also cover up a word leaving only the initial letter or letters so that learners use graphonic as well as syntactic and semantic cues to predict (Vale and Feunteun 1995: 145).
 - The pupils say whether something is wrong or not in the following repetitions of the same story so that the teacher can check if the class really understand the story or not. (For instance, Little Red Riding Hood's father said 'Take these sandwiches to your uncle'.)

These activities help children to concentrate on the story because their concentration span is very short. Moreover, it is also a way of helping them to memorise chants, songs or key vocabulary from the story.

Post-listening stage tasks: The teacher knows that a story provides a framework for different ways to help pupils learn. First of all, the teacher thinks about the language of the story such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, functions or discourses. The teacher is also conscious of the demands s/he can make of his/her pupils, such as sequencing, comparing, identifying, classifying, hypothesising and ranking. S/He also takes into account the resources s/he can have at hand such as published materials, real objects, visual aids, CD and DVD as well as visits to places related to the story. Taking all these characteristics into account the teacher develops a number of activities based on the story that the pupils must do such as listening to instructions, making a survey, measuring and counting, carrying out an investigation, retelling a story, reading a dialogue and playing a game. When the teacher is planning these activities s/he must take into account a variety of both language and study skills and how to use these activities, either with the whole class or in small groups. After carrying out all these activities pupils make different things such as brief written texts, drama and role plays, stories recorded on tape, completed charts and drawings and models. The teacher can use some of these products to decorate the classroom.

Post-listening stage tasks consolidate the vocabulary or grammar introduced in the story. These activities allow the students to use what they have learned in the story, integrating language learning with meaningful and interesting content. Children can use realia and drawings or research about a topic related to the story. They should work either in groups (as children learn to cooperate) or individually, depending on the task. Moreover, children usually integrate different skills such as writing for an invitation, speaking while acting and so on. These activities create a more positive attitude to learning English, as children feel more self-confident about themselves. These activities take place in the context of the story and so they make learning more meaningful and create a genuine purpose for learning and for using language in the classroom.

Most of post-listening stage tasks provide many opportunities for pupils to express their own ideas as in the following examples:

- They can check if their previous predictions are true or false.
- They can invent a similar story or a different one. In this way, Sheelagh Deller (1990) and Seth Lindstromberg (1990) explain different techniques to write stories. For instance, one is *Do-it-yourself story* in which the student, by answering a number of questions, tells a story. Another is *Sound sequence*. Here a group of students play a tape with a number of noises recorded at home and the rest of their classmates prepare stories to fit the sound sequences. Finally, another example is *Stories from tapes*. A group of students think of a story the rest of the class do not know. This group record up to twenty questions in a tape. The rest of the class listen to it while answering the questions in order to make the most similar story to that thought up by the first group. The fourth is called behind a song, as the students have to think of a story based on a song. In general, these techniques involve all the class members and make students use their imagination to use things and to think about stories.
- In groups they write questions to exchange with other groups and to answer them. They can classify items of vocabulary (colours, fruits, clothes and so on). They can compare characters and spot similarities and differences.
- Pupils also work on activities based on the story whose aim is to reinforce the vocabulary and grammar in the story. For instance children can create their own picture dictionary from stories heard in class.
- Different groups can tell several sections of the story or act out the main points of the story. Plays greatly encourage children and make relationship between the children and the teacher closer. Plays can either be acted in the classroom during the lesson or using costumes for an end-of-year play. Another similar activity is the puppet show. Children can easily make their own puppets using paper bags or faces stuck on lollipop sticks or pencils. Children can work in pairs or groups in the classroom. Moreover, they can integrate the written skills by making their own programme and invitations for the show.
- Everyone in the class plays the same character in a well known fairy-tale. Each participant imagines what moment in the fairy-tale is most important for him or her, what the character might say and do. They then move around the room repeating the same phrase and action several times. After a while, they can begin to extend their character and the story line by expressing themselves more freely.
- Pupils draw a scene that takes place in the story. Children love drawing and colouring.
The teacher draws a scene from the story on the blackboard and children have to find out in which part of the story the scene takes place.
- They draw a new cover for the story and invent a new mask. They can also draw a map signalling the route followed by the main characters in the story.
- They can make posters about the story with the most important information from the story.

- They classify and put in order the illustrations of the story and say a sentence related to the illustrations.

Consequently, some of these activities may involve moving classroom furniture to allow pupils to work together or to make room for the acting. In addition to this, many of the final products which children work on might have to do with masks or puppets. So it is a good idea to have coloured paper, scissors, glue, coloured pencils and old magazines for pupils to cut up.

Another important thing is that this kind of activities allows students to integrate themselves into other areas such as maths, music, geography and so on. Integrating language with other subjects can be beneficial for the following reasons:

- It gives children a broader perspective on why they are learning English, so that they do not always see it in isolation from other subjects.
- It reinforces certain key content areas and concepts.
- It can maximize the limited time often given to foreign language learning by offering opportunities to revise or review relevant language as the opportunity arises. For example, revising numbers in English for two minutes in the math class (Ellis & Brewster 1991: 68).

In Spain teachers of English only give classes of English as a foreign language. Therefore, if a teacher of English wants to integrate English work with other areas of the curriculum it is worth building up a close working relationship with other teachers in the school or finding out what the students study in the school syllabus.

Exhibition of tasks: As I have already stated previously the teacher knows that when children do post-listening activities, either in groups or individually, they can produce many things such as new stories, pictures, masks or posters related to the story and so on. According to Brumfit, Moon and Tongue (1991),

when children are allowed to be themselves, they will be active. They are irrepressible doers, because it is by doing that they learn. Various forces stimulate children into activity, most evident among them play, creativity and curiosity (Brumfit, Moon and Tongue 1991: 20).

Children want to invent and create things in order to play and have fun and, finally, they are also curious so they want to experiment. These activities take advantage of these features and help involve him/her in the story and to create positive attitudes towards English learning. Children should be encouraged to display their work. This helps develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. Moreover, displays make the classroom brighter and more colourful. In addition to this, it is convenient to have a room for the exhibition of the things that students have made. It encourages a purposeful working atmosphere and usually leads to higher motivation since the children's work is made public.

7. CONCLUSION

Using story telling is a motivating activity. The teacher of English fulfils most of the objectives for the English subject in Primary Education given by the Ministry. However, there are more reasons to use them in class. Stories exercise imagination and it is also a way of helping pupils to learn in all areas of their curriculum. However, it is not an easy activity. The teacher has to develop a number of skills to improve his/her storytelling. In addition, the children have to develop their concentrating and listening skills by means of the illustrations or while listening stage tasks. The teacher has to plan a number of story-based activities for his/her class. Children develop the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, but with an emphasis on oral skills. Children do the activities autonomously so that cooperation among pupils is promoted and, consequently, the pupil-to-pupil interaction as well. They become autonomous in their own learning processes and children learn to learn for themselves.

NOTES

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1. This investigation is part of the research project "El desarrollo de la competencia léxica en la adquisición del inglés en educación primaria" funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (Grant nº BFF2003-04009-C02-02) and by the University of La Rioja (Grant API-02/31).
 2. Authors such as Barabara Bennett and others (1991), Brumfit, Moon and Tongue (1991), Carter and Long (1991), Ellis and Brewster(1991), Kennedy and Jarvis (1991), Brewster, Girard and Ellis (1992), Howe and Johnson (1992), Zaro and Salaberri (1993), García Arrezas, Segura Baez and Zamora López (1994), Genesee (1994), Halliwell (1994), Vale and Feunteun (1995), Wright (1996), Villaroel (1997) or Barreras Gómez (2003).
 3. See works such as Broughton et al. (1980), Scout and Ytreberg (1990), Brumfit, Moon and Tongue (1991), Tough (1991), Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), Phillips (1993), Cameron (1994 and 2001), García Arrezas et al. (1994), Halliwell (1994), Vale and Feunteun (1995), Williams (1998) and Barreras Gómez (2004).
 4. Authors such as Zaro and Salaberri (1993), García Arrezas, Segura Saez and Zamora Navas (1994), Wright (1996) and Villaroel (1997).
 5. Authors such as Carter and Long (1991), Ellis and Brewter (1991), Brumfit, Moon and Tongue (1991), Kennedy and Jarvis (1991), Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), Zaro and Salaberri (1993) Wright (1996) and Villaroel (1997).
 6. Authors such as Morgan and Rinvolucrí (1983), Ellis and Brewster (1991), Carter and Long (1991), Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), Howe and Johson (1992) Wright (1996), Villaroel (1997) and Barreras Gómez (2003).
 7. Authors such as Opal Dunn (1989), Brumfit, Moon and Tongue (1991), Brewster, Ellis and Girard (1992), García Arrezas, Segura Saez and Zamora Navas (1994), Villaroel (1997) and Barreras Gómez (2003).
 8. Such as Morgan and Rinvolucrí (1983), Lindstromberg (1990), Deller (1990), Bennett and others (1991), Ellis and Brewster (1991), Brewster, Ellis & Girard (1992), Howe and Johnson (1992), Cross and others (1994), García Arrezas, Segura Baez, Zamora López (1994), Vale & Feunteun (1995), Wright (1996) and Barreras Gómez (2003).
 9. A good study on this topic is Buzan and Buzan (1996).

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