

TELLING TRUE STORIES:

BLENDING MULTIMEDIA IN A TASK-BASED ACTIVITY

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Level: Upper Intermediate and above

Time: at least 3 periods (50 minutes each)

Aims:

1. To learn the basic structures (see Introduction) and expressions used when telling true stories.
2. To enhance listening, reading comprehension and writing skills.
3. To engage in a chat activity with a native speaker of English integrating language skills.
4. To foster oral communication skills by giving learners opportunities to use the language in an authentic manner or real-life situation.

Technical Requirements:

- at least one computer for each student (or a group of 2) with the Internet access;
- Yahoo Messenger (YM) installed, which is a free chat software available at <http://messenger.yahoo.com/>;
- a multimedia projector or any broadcasting system that could project images/sounds. If you do not have access to any of these equipment but have enough computers for all your students (Ss), then invite as many Ss as you can to YM but limit their participation. Only selected Ss will have the privilege to speak;

- an optional web cam;
- a word-processor.

Introduction

Telling true stories is a basic English usage task that is used on a daily basis (Beare, 2003). Unfortunately, Ss struggle with their grammar usage while speaking the English language that they wind up being less understandable. A typical story telling structure outline consists of:

1. Introduction: Introduce the story by telling what kind of story it is
2. Beginning: How the story started
3. the Story: The main events related in order
4. The End: What has changed or how things are now
5. Moral: Final Comments or moral conclusions about the story.

The lesson plan is heavily influenced by a lesson that was selected from Kenneth Beare's ESL Lesson archive available at <http://esl.about.com/library/lessons/bltellingstories.htm>, and is the basis for this class activity, which is divided into three phases, 1) pre-online chat, 2) during chat, and 3) post-online chat activity.

Necessary Preparation

Prior to the activity, the teacher should arrange for a guest speaker (a native speaker of English or a non-native but with near-native English proficiency) to meet with the Ss. Since this activity requires collaboration between the teacher, the guest speaker/s and Ss, it is advisable to invite someone you know (a friend, family member/s and/or colleagues). You may also find support from professional organizations such as TESOL or IATEFL and their respective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Interest Sections (IS) or Special Interest Group (SIG). Teachers can also benefit from joining

online collaborative communities such as the Webheads in Action

(http://www.geocities.com/vance_stevens/papers/evonline2002/webheads.htm), epals

(www.epals.com), and Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections (www.iecc.org).

Time and availability of the guest speaker should also be taken into consideration.

Procedure

I. Pre-Online Chat Warm-up Activity

Time: 10 minutes

1. A short discussion about telling true stories
2. You can initiate the class discussion by sharing your own story.
3. Then, gather students' opinions and experiences by asking questions such as, "Have you ever told someone about a funny, scary or any memorable incident that happened to you?", "Have you ever shared stories with your best friend, mom or teacher?")
4. After soliciting answers to your questions, you can now tell your Ss what the activity is about. For example, "You will be meeting (name of guest speaker) online and he/she will share with you a true story..."
5. Explain in detail the tasks that they will have to accomplish for the day.

II. Voice Conference with Students

Time: 40 minutes

Notes:

For the online chat activity, the teacher should make sure that all the computers to be used have Internet access and YM chat software has been successfully installed.

Steps:

1. The teacher should log in and start the voice conference by opening YM.

2. Choose between 5-10 student volunteers.
3. Ask the students to log in YM.
4. Add the students' Yahoo ID onto the teacher's YM's Group of Friends.
5. Slowly invite the students in the conference by clicking on the "invite" feature of YM.
6. Start the conference as soon as everybody (students and the guest speaker) has settled down. The LCD projector should be running at this point to broadcast and project images as they appear on the students' monitors (A step-by-step procedure is available here, <http://www.geocities.com/nkfust2003/listening/story/procedure/steps.html>)
7. The students who are offline (the number could depend on the total number of students in class) can still participate by watching the big screen where images from the chat conference are projected via LCD projector. This way, these Ss could read and understand what's going on in the voice/text conference (see photos and chat log here, http://www.geocities.com/nkfust2003/listening/story/ed/p2_edm.htm)
8. Ask the guest speaker to begin sharing her/his story to the class by either typing on the keyboard or by using voice.
9. After the guest speaker has shared her/his story, the Ss take turns in asking questions or posting their comments/opinions.
10. After the chat, save the chat log before closing the voice conference interface. The log can be used for assessment purposes and a material for peer feedback.

Teaching Tips

The interaction between the Ss and the native speaker should be as spontaneous and natural as possible. Yahoo! tends to be unstable when there are more than 15 online

participants. The connection speed will depend on the computer's bandwidth and the Internet connection. If you lose voice or any of your Ss is unable to hear the sound, it would be wise to settle for a text-based chat. Instead of clicking or pressing the 'Talk' icon on Yahoo's voice conference interface, ask the participants to simply type on the keyboard.

III. Offline Post-chat Activity

Time: 50 minutes

1. Follow up your guest speaker's story with some basic comprehension questions to check whether the whole class understands her/his story. You may touch on the moral lesson of the story by invoking such questions as 'What did you learn from it?' or "If you were him/her, would you have done the same thing?"
2. Ask the Ss to reflect and think of a situation that they have experienced. The time in which the event/s occurred is not important. It could be last week, last month, as long as it happened in the past. The nature of the story could be one of or combination of the following: happy, sad, scary, inspirational, keeping in suspense, etc.
3. Ask the Ss to plan and write their own true stories of about 100 words.
4. The written work can be printed out or uploaded on the class website (see http://www.geocities.com/nkfust2003/listening/story/sample_joy/sample.html)

IV. Students Telling Their Own True Stories

Time: 50 minutes

1. Students take turns in sharing their stories to the whole class (after the writing phase).
2. Ss may be allowed to look at their notes but try to encourage spontaneous

delivery.

3. Encourage discussion from the class.

Conclusion

Technology is a salient tool and medium in implementing this activity, however, we cannot refute the fact that it is not perfect. Technological problems, no matter how trivial could, in a way, affect the outcomes; but, they are not barriers to learning. Teachers are advised to prepare an alternative course of action and give Ss an extra time for technical prep. As they say, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Another important issue that should be considered is the appropriateness of the material or the story. Although, story telling is conversational in essence and the use of colloquial terms and phrases may seem inevitable, offensive expressions are unacceptable even in real-life situations. In a nutshell, the tasks in this activity are designed to achieve the aims of the lesson by combining a blended approach to learning English, crossing boundaries and cultural dimensions and using a different learning environment that cannot be recreated in a regular classroom.

Reference:

Beare, K. 2003. "Telling True Stories for English Learners and Classes". Available at

<http://esl.about.com/library/lessons/bltellingstories.htm>