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Барбара Циморота

Греческая федерация владельцев школ иностранных языков
(PALSO), Греция

**ЧТЕНИЕ СКАЗОК В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ
ЯЗЫКУ МЛАДШИХ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ В ГРЕЧЕСКОЙ
ЧАСТНОЙ ШКОЛЕ**

Основная цель данного кейса - представить, как сборники сказок можно использовать вместе с учебником на занятиях для создания благоприятной и мотивирующей учебной среды. В частности, в статье анализируется, как сборники сказок применяются в качестве «средства обучения» для группы учащихся от 8 до 15 лет в частной школе иностранных языков. Применение такого метода подкрепляется теорией овладения первым и вторым иностранным языком, и имеет дополнительные преимущества для изучающих иностранный язык, если они выбраны надлежащим образом и адекватно используются в классе. В кейсе автор выясняет, может ли чтение сказок способствовать обучению языку без принуждения. В результате выдвигаются предложения о интеграции сказок в школьный учебный план после более тщательного исследования.

Ключевые слова: овладение языком, парадигма литературного чтения, сказительство.

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Barbara Tziorota

Panhellenic Federation of Foreign Language School Owners
(PALSO), Greece

**SUPPLEMENTING A COURSEBOOK WITH STORIES FOR
A GROUP OF B JUNIOR LEARNERS IN A PRIVATE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN GREECE**

The primary purpose of this case study is to present how storybooks

can be used parallel to a coursebook in the classroom to create a supportive and motivating learning environment. In particular, it illustrates the way storybooks function as a 'learning tool' for a group of fifteen eight to ten year old students in a private foreign language school. The use of stories is supported by theories concerning first and second language acquisition, but also justified by further benefits they bring to foreign language learners if they are chosen appropriately and exploited adequately in the classroom. The case study will try to demonstrate whether storytelling can promote language acquisition unforcefully or not. It concludes with the suggestion of integrating stories into a school's syllabus design after more thorough research.

Keywords: language acquisition, story-based framework, storytelling.

Introduction

One of the most difficult situations a teacher of young learners probably faces is how to motivate them and sustain their interest levels high, and as a result, create optimal conditions and opportunities for learning to take place. Very often teachers find themselves trapped in materials that teach grammar, vocabulary, functions or language skills quite satisfactorily, but nonetheless the learners do not embrace them with the anticipated enthusiasm and interest. Recent research has addressed the question of the impact of storytelling on the development of skills and the promotion of language acquisition in a relaxing and supportive environment.

Keeping these facts in mind, the primary purpose of this case study is to examine the way stories were integrated with the coursebook framework and the effect they had on a group of fifteen eight to ten-year-old learners' competence. The implementation of the story-based framework took place in a private foreign language school in Grevena where learners have been taught English for two years. Data was gathered by means of two questionnaires: the first questionnaire was conducted at the beginning of the course to support the implementation of the story-based framework, while the second one reveals the beneficial influence of stories on learners.

Profile of the target group

The research was conducted in a private foreign language school in Grevena, Northern Greece, in which the researcher was the teacher of

the class. The group consists of fifteen learners, ten girls and five boys between 8 and 10 years of age, who have been learning English for two years and their language level is beginner. Two students are Albanians and the rest of them Greek. Interestingly enough, four of the students are also learning another foreign language – German – at primary school.

A description of the coursebook and its limitations

The students attend English classes four times a week: two sessions of one and a half teaching hours (75') when they use 'Primary Colours 2' by Cambridge University Press, and a one hour session (50') when they are taught grammar by means of photocopies. They also have a computer session once a week (50') when they revise language from the coursebook, play word games and do crosswords.

The coursebook comprises of a student's book, an activity book, a companion, a teacher's, audio cassettes and flashcards. There is a welcome unit and six topic-based units, four lessons each, as well as a storyline with the same characters living adventures that unfolds in the three lessons of each unit, whereas the fourth lesson is a story complete and coherent in each unit.

The fact that students showed enthusiasm for the stories in the coursebook, along with the fact that they were tired with the grammar class, necessitated some alterations to be made in the existent syllabus. The teacher's initial thought was to substitute the grammar session with a storybook and use it as a means to teach language in a natural, friendly way. Therefore, the coursebook framework and the story - based framework would run parallel throughout the year to guarantee best results.

The questionnaire carried out with the class

However, in order to blend new elements within the current framework, careful research needs to be carried out to collect as much data as possible regarding the learners in question, and to make sure that any alterations are well-supported and verified.

Thus, a questionnaire was distributed among the learners to collect information that would justify the changes. The B junior class in question, completed the Greek version of the questionnaire to provide invaluable data about their learning, since their knowledge of the English language is still elementary.

Findings of the questionnaire

As it was expected, the questionnaire provided helpful information to draw a complete profile of the learners in question. Particularly, the fact that students enjoyed reading in both languages, their preference for storybooks, adventure books and fairy tales and jokes, together with the high regularity of reading showed by students, indicated that the teacher should reorganize classroom materials around the students' interests to achieve best results, that is incorporate reading texts the students found interesting on a regular basis (Brewster et al, 2002: 186).

The use of storybooks learners are familiar with in their mother tongue would be a chance to improve their reading skills, make inferences about unknown words based on context or background knowledge ('schemata'), and would also provide extra listening practice which the learners need. Finally the altered syllabus would have to include even more songs, stories, fairy-tales, CD, video, group work and project work, all in the top of the students' preferences so as to get them more involved in learning.

Methodological background

The behaviourist model

One can trace the first attempt to explain language acquisition to behaviourists, represented mainly by Skinner (1957), whose idea of 'conditioning of the human behaviour' was extended to the acquisition of human language as well. For behaviourists the model 'stimulus – response – reinforcement' (Hadaway et al, 2002, p. 25) accounts for the way people acquire human language the way it does for other forms of behaviour. Skinner (1957) assumes that children imitate what they see, hear or experience and behave likewise. Of course the kind and the amount of reinforcement they receive from the environment will encourage the children to produce even more correct language. The importance of the Skinnerian practices in the EFL classroom within the story based framework are well grounded. Stories contain a lot of repetitive patterns, language that reoccurs, and rhymes which are an excellent chance for the children to join in (Browne, 1996, p. 80; Brumfit et al, 1991, p. 159; Hadaway et al, 2002, p. 41).

The innatist theory

Contrary to the view that language is acquired by responding to external stimuli, innatists believe that language acquisition is

predetermined and is hardly affected by the linguistic environment that surrounds the learner. Abiding by Chomsky (1959), the most fervent supporter of the innatist approach, children are 'prewired' to learn a language, they are biologically programmed to discover the rules of the language, since their internal mechanism enables them to: the Language Acquisition Device (LAD).

The fact that innatists view grammar as being central in language acquisition is compatible with the way stories are organised thematically and temporarily: there is a sequence of events arranged in chronological order, linked by cause and effect relationship, that unfold gradually, lead to a climax and finally to resolution, all within discourse (Cameron, 2001, p. 162; Lazar, 1993, p. 73). What is mostly remarkable however, is the fact that the language of stories is presented in context rather than in isolated sentences and is thematically structured and temporarily linked, therefore more memorable (Cameron, 2001, p. 160 – 161). Language items are subconsciously acquired or reinforced in a meaningful context (Brewster et al, 1991, p. 159).

Stages of cognitive development according to Piaget

The interactionist Piaget (1951) undermined the theory of Behaviourism because it viewed language as a subject's response to external stimuli only. For him language acquisition is the result of the child's innate mental capacities that determine language development in combination with the linguistic environment. In his own account, during childhood the children go through different stages of cognitive development which determine the language they produce.

In terms of stories, children can become active 'sense – makers' since they use the background knowledge they already possess ('schemata' as defined in Richards, 1990, p. 51) to 'accommodate' and 'assimilate' new ideas (Brewster et al, 1991, p. 158; Garvie, 1990, p. 55). Stories activate children's thought, present contextualized language and promote language acquisition, especially if the children already know them in their mother tongue. However, the teacher should bear in mind Piaget's cognitive stages as to make sure the child is ready to accept the new knowledge, is at the right cognitive and language level.

Social Constructivism

Unlike Piaget who neglected the importance of language in

children's development, Vygotsky (1978) places significant emphasis on the role the social context plays in the development of human language. Related to him is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which refers to what a child can achieve alone, and what he / she can do while interacting with more competent speakers like a parent or a teacher.

Parents or teachers should 'scaffold' a child's understanding gradually and steadily – just like constructing a house – until it finally stands up independently (Pollard, 1997, p. 125 as quoted in Andrews et al, 2000, unit 1, p. 3). 'Good scaffolding' should be tuned with the learner's needs and, as the child proceeds and becomes more competent, it should be adjusted and finally minimized.

In view of the constructivist theory discussed above, stories constitute an ideal opportunity for teachers to 'scaffold' their learners' knowledge, since the notion of 'scaffolding' has been transferred to the classroom, too. Bruner (1983 in Cameron, 2001, p. 9 – 10) appreciates the reading of stories to children from babyhood onwards by parents but by teachers as well.

Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence

Another precondition for successful 'scaffolding', is to take into account the learners' variable features reminding us of Gardner's (1983) 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' and the different types of learners. Based on Gardner's theory as analysed by Puchta & Rinvolutri (2005, p. 7 – 19), stories can offer ample opportunities for language development: students can listen to a story told, read a story, retell a story, discuss it with other students or the teacher in class (linguistic and interpersonal intelligence), relate it to their own experience (intrapersonal intelligence), sing songs or listen to background music and effects accompanying a story on CD (musical intelligence), act the story out (bodily – kinaesthetic and spatial intelligence).

The benefits of using storybooks in the classroom

Reading for pleasure

Perhaps the most important value of stories lies in the fact that a pleasant and anxiety – free atmosphere is created which facilitates language learning, since learners feel free to experiment with the target language. Stories are motivating and fun and allow learners to experience language in a childlike fashion, through play, amusing

characters living adventures, and as a result acquire it unconsciously without noticing.

Personal involvement

Apart from the entertainment element stories carry, their value lies also in the way they reveal students' feelings and emotions, and the way students associate these feelings with second language (Brewster et al, 2002, p. 187; Wright, 1999, p. 47). Medlicott (1993, p. 7) notices that stories can be an 'intense relief' for children learning languages because there is a 'journey of feeling which expands and completes itself in the sound of voice'. Stories help students get to know themselves better because they place themselves in the characters' position, they feel the emotions the protagonists experience or hear their voices, they sympathize their dilemmas getting personally involved and 'entering into the story' (Browne, 1996, p. 64).

Social awareness

Other than getting the students personally involved, stories promote strong bonds within the 'storytelling community' among students and the teacher. Wright (1999, p. 47) suggests that 'stories invite empathy and sharing between students in class, and later between the students and other users of English they meet'. Students spend time together in class: listening to a story told by the teacher, exchanging ideas, feelings, opening up to others. Brewster et al (2002, p. 187) advocate that listening to a story in class 'provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation', while Scott & Ytreberg (1990, p. 55) admit that sharing stories in class is a good starting point for encouraging reading among learners.

Development of imagination

It goes without saying that the beneficial aspect of stories lies also in the way they excite and promote children's imagination. During childhood the boundaries between the real and the imaginary world overlap and children try to make sense of the world around them through fantasy and imagine how it would be different. Halliwell (1992, p. 7) advocates that teachers should build on imagination in the language classroom as a means to teach, simply because nothing is absurd in a child's world; even a dinosaur can make a perfect pet for a child.

Cultural awareness

Another parametre worth considering is the cultural sensitivity

stories bring about in learners. While listening to or reading stories children come in contact with other cultures, traditions, beliefs and behaviours. They move away from a monocultural perspective and can compare cultures (Brewster et al, 2002, p. 187), get to know others and the world more fully (Browne, 1996, p. 64; Brumfit & Carter, 1986, p. 25) and discover differences or similarities between themselves and other people (Ellis, 1999, p. 17). An illustrative example is provided by Wright (1999, p. 47), who cites different versions of how the story of Little Red Riding Hood ends to manifest different cultural perceptions: in the traditional French version LRRH plays a trick on the wolf and gets away, but in a Liverpool women's version LRRH and her grandma kill the wolf, skin it and wear its coat.

Human values

The importance of storybooks in the foreign language classroom lies also in their embodiment of human values and morals. Collie & Slater (1987, p. 3) ascertain that literature abounds in human values which are enduring rather than ephemeral. For instance, the Shakespearean characters are explored nowadays for their psychoanalytical profiles. Cameron (2001, p. 161) supports that every story told has a moral to teach. For example, the traditional story of LRRH has two morals: that children should listen to and obey their parents but also that wickedness will be overcome in the end.

Curriculum links

Stories can also be used to expand and consolidate other subject areas across the curriculum (Brewster et al, 2002, p. 187). A very successful implementation of this idea is provided by Hadaway et al (2002, p. 252 – 267) who integrate literature, maths, geography and art under the 'umbrella' theme of weather. More specifically, students discuss weather phenomena and weather disasters in different parts of the world brainstorming ideas or surfing the internet (geography). They record weather statistics on a chart or in a graph (maths), read poems about weather and weather images and moods (literature), or make a collage of weather words and pictures cut from magazines and newspapers (art).

Development of literacy and oracy skills

Undoubtedly the ultimate goal achieved by using storybooks in the classroom is the development of the four skills. Starting from the reading skill, students receive ample practice through stories to get to

know the mechanics of reading and develop reading strategies. In writing students can tell their own stories and give shape to their experiences. They may write a review of a story they read or a few paragraphs using stylistic features of the story (Lazar, 1993, p. 86) or even write a story from a different perspective or rewrite the ending of it. Just like in reading, storybooks can develop children's listening strategies and speaking skills. They can discuss about the cover and the title of the storybook, exchange information about the author's life or events in their own country during the period of the story (Lazar, 1993, p. 84), act out the story (Cameron, 2001, p. 176).

Criteria for selecting storybooks

Readability

The first linguistic criterion to take into consideration is 'readability', that is the story should be the right level of difficulty concerning grammar, structures, functions, vocabulary, rhythm and pattern. As Ellis & Brewster (1991, p. 12 – 13) point out, a teacher should choose storybooks whose language is neither too difficult, nor too easy for the learners, abundant in structures, functions and vocabulary that do not intimidate learners as being too difficult but rather provide a positive learning experience.

Suitability

Another criterion that influences the language teacher in his / her choice of storybooks is the suitability of content. Abiding by Ellis & Brewster (1991, p. 12 – 13) a good storybook should be 'relevant, interesting, amusing and memorable' to the learners; in other words 'inspiring, entertaining or thought provoking' (Browne, 1996, p. 71). Wright (1995, p. 11) advises teachers to choose stories that will attract the learners' interest from the very beginning and which the children will be able to understand so as to enjoy them. Another dimension of the 'suitability' criterion is that of human values and attitudes projected in the story. The extent to which children agree and accept values and behaviours exploited by the characters in the story is worth considering.

Cultural appropriacy

Linked to the above criterion is the one of 'cultural appropriacy' which draws our attention to the cultural information contained in storybooks. Brewster et al (2002, p. 190 – 191) and Ellis & Brewster (1991, p. 162 – 163), suggest that storybooks should not contain obscure cultural references or be too culture specific because they may

puzzle the young learners. Parker & Parker (in Brumfit et al, 1991, p. 186), propose using storybooks learners are familiar with in their mother tongue, or books written by the teacher of the class who knows the students' needs best.

Accessibility

Another factor important in maintaining motivation levels high is 'accessibility' of the book. Elements such as the front cover, colours, the quality of paper, photographs and overall designs, illustrations, graphs and letter size – all external features – can appeal to the children's visual sense and increase their eagerness to read the book. An interesting point is raised by Browne (1996, p. 67) who considers picture books as the ideal storybooks for very young learners, exactly because they combine text and visuals and they release children's feelings and perspectives.

Variety and Length

It goes without saying that variety in storybooks is important, too. Young learners get bored easily and lose interest, so storybooks with a variety of language, style, characters and topics are likely to keep them alert. Browne (1996, p. 73) suggests that a storybook contain a range of characters (e.g. male / female, young / old), language (e.g. repetitive / non-repetitive, longer text / simple text), styles (e.g. simple, sincere, humourous), content (e.g. fantasy / real life, fiction / non-fiction) as to embark the learners on a 'rich reading journey'.

Apart from variety, the storybook should not be too long but manageable for young learners, without long descriptive passages (Brumfit in Brumfit et al, 1991, p. 189). It should also maintain a balance between dialogue (suitable for acting out) and narrative (repetitive language that encourages participation) (Cameron, 2001, p. 168).

Exploitability

One final key issue worth considering when choosing stories is 'exploitability' i.e. whether the storybook used provides enough opportunities for activities to develop language. The educational potential of storybooks lies in the extent to which teachers can promote learners' learning strategies, how they can develop and integrate all four skills, how they can link stories with other subjects in the curriculum and accommodate all learning styles, and cater for multiple intelligences (Brewster et al, 2002, p. 190 – 191).The selection of

storybooks based on the above criteria is bound to generate students' interest in learning.

Considerations when applying a story – based framework in the classroom

Reading or telling a story

There is no doubt that the teacher is the most powerful person in the storytelling process. A teacher can choose whether to read a story while students follow in their books – which is the most traditional way of story delivery – or whether to tell a story based on prepared notes or a diagram. A preferable technique is for the teacher to have some key points in diagrammatic form or skeleton, which serve as a starting point, but also allow him / her freedom to improvise telling the story, watching the students' reactions and maintaining eye contact (Morgan & Rinvolutri, 1988, p. 8 – 9; Wright, 1995, p. 12).

Seating arrangements

Another way for the teacher to establish adequate eye contact with the students is to have them sit on the floor in a circle around him / her. This way, all students can see the teacher's face, observe any facial expressions or body movements, and look at the illustrations of the book the teacher holds (Brewster et al, 2002, p. 197). Wright (1995, p. 13) and Vale & Feunten (1995, p. 203) admit that this seating arrangement brings students and teachers closer, creating an impression of the teacher as an equal in the group.

Establishing rapport

Since listening to a story is not only listening to a text but rather 'feeling' it with the senses, it is important to create an atmosphere and draw children in. Rowshan (1997, p. 44 – 48) admits that children must be in a 'receptive frame of mind' and trust the teacher completely when reading a book, and a way to manage this is to choose a quiet time of the day to tell stories (e.g. bedtime at home), or do some relaxation exercises in class before storytelling, a technique also favoured by Morgan & Rinvolutri (1988, p. 10).

Voice

Other than these, the teacher can put students in a 'story frame of mind' – to borrow Wright's term (1995, p. 13) – by making full use of his / her own potential. Rinvolutri (1998, p. 17 – 18) discusses how a teacher's voice (directionality, pitch, volume and tempo being its constituents) can facilitate students' perception of the story and

transcend them to an imaginary world.

Body movements and facial expressions

Linked to the importance of a teacher's voice are the body movements and facial expressions a teacher uses as means to support storytelling. Brewster et al (2002, p. 197), Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1988, p. 8), and Wright (1995, p. 17) admit that using gestures, mime, vivid facial expressions, slow and simple movements, rephrasing or adjusting the telling of a story, following the students' reactions and looking them in the eyes, can increase their involvement and understanding of it.

Mother tongue

Of course some use of the mother tongue might be necessary at times, especially if the children are at a beginners level (Brewster et al 1991, p. 23). Very young learners get discouraged quite easily, and in order to prevent this from happening, a teacher should make them feel comfortable with the target language – even by resorting to mother tongue when necessary.

Pauses

Another point worth considering for the teacher is the use of pauses while telling a story. It is vital to give students time to reflect on the story, to browse at pictures, to predict what will happen next. Hearne (2005, p. 39 – 47) praises silent pauses in storytelling because they allow both the listener time to internalize the story, but also the storyteller to improvise, to reflect on the audience's reactions (ibid, p.41), and resembles silence in a story with space in an image, dynamic and essential (ibid, p. 43).

Realia

Another way a teacher can improve his / her storytelling techniques is to use 'realia' i.e. real objects in the classroom to create an atmosphere. Wright (1995, p. 14) advises that a teacher carry a 'storybag' in the classroom with objects related to the story (e.g. puppets, toy animals, pictures), or dress up for storytelling, an idea also shared by Morgan & Rinvoluceri (1988, p. 10) Likewise, Browne (1996, p. 81 – 82) suggests that such 'story sacks' containing the picture book, games, soft toys and tapes, can encourage children to enjoy story reading and explore storybooks.

Assessing storytelling techniques

Finally, a teacher should spend some time evaluating his / her

storytelling techniques as to achieve best results. Brewster et al (2002, p. 201) and Ellis & Brewster (1991, p. 31) provide a useful self - assessment sheet on how a teacher can assess the techniques used while telling a story, covering aspects such as intonation, pronunciation, stress, rhythm and pupil participation. Similarly, Wright (1995, p. 20) provides a checklist for editing a teacher's storytelling craft. Obviously this can make a teacher more reflective and knowledgeable of how to improve storytelling in classroom as to serve learners' needs better.

Study and results

Storybook selection

The two storybooks 'Snow White' and 'Goldilocks and the three bears' seem to be compatible with the criteria for selecting storybooks as discussed. More specifically, the stories seem to be appropriate for the learners' language level as they contain simple grammatical structures and restricted vocabulary (up to 200 words). Snow White and 'Goldilocks and the three bears' contain a lot of repetition, which encourages participation in the story (Cameron, 2001, p. 63).

Another parametre by which the stories were chosen was 'suitability'. The two storybooks are most probably suitable for the learners' age and interests, they touch upon topics 'within their experience of life and are conceptually accessible' (Williams, 1998, p. 6). Moreover, young children can understand the morals hidden in the two stories: that they should never trust strangers (Snow White) or intervene in other peoples' private life (Goldilocks and the three bears). A further advantage of the two storybooks selected might be the fact that most students know them in their mother tongue already and as a result comprehend the stories in English more easily.

Finally, the stories can be exploited in many ways. They can provide a meaningful context for both grammar and vocabulary practice as plenty of purposeful and meaningful activities can derive from the texts (Brewster et al 2001, p. 187). Moreover, they are likely to be an excellent opportunity to practise and integrate all four skills.

Changes in the teacher's teaching practices

Obviously the alternative method of teaching required a great deal of willingness on behalf of the teacher to change her teaching practices. First and foremost the teacher had to change seating arrangements in class: the traditional rows of desks with students sitting one behind another were replaced by a round table, suitable for activities, and a

colourful carpet on the floor, where students sat to listen to their teacher tell the story. This new arrangement of the class brought the students closer, put them in a 'story frame of mind' (Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1988, p. 10; Wright, 1995, p. 13) and enabled the teacher to have eye contact with all the students and show them visuals to support the delivery of the story.

Perhaps the biggest challenge the teacher faced during this new approach was the new role she employed. Moving away from teaching mere grammatical structures, vocabulary and skills with the help of the coursebook, she discovered new possibilities of her own teaching potential. For instance, she understood that the storybook was a 'magic tool' in her hands and she could transmit this magic to the kids and transcend them to an imaginary world.

Another way the stories helped the teacher improve herself was that she had to devote ample time preparing for the lesson. Initially she had to prepare notes and key points to help her remember the story and she had to rehearse beforehand (Morgan & Rinvoluceri, 1998, p. 8 – 9; Wright, 1995, p. 12). It was also essential to have a range of 'realia' and music handy in order to motivate learners.

Benefits for the students

Looking back at the 'experimental course', the learners seem to have benefited in many ways. First of all, it offered them plenty of opportunities to develop their listening skills. Regarding the speaking benefits, the stories seem to have offered the appropriate 'input' for the learners to convert it into 'output'. Their speaking time increased as they were actively involved in storytelling even during the teacher's delivery of the story. Moreover, they discussed with the teacher and the rest of the class about the morals of the stories or the behaviour of the characters. As far as their reading skills are concerned, the students received ample practice during the story sessions. They had an opportunity to employ different reading strategies so as to comprehend the texts. Last but not least, the linguistic merits of the 'experimental course' were evident in the students' progress in writing. The stories provided the learners with a meaningful context within which to write a paragraph with prompts or guidance.

Apart from the linguistic benefits the stories encouraged social interaction in the classroom and supported collaborative talk. Meanwhile, the students realized that they had to work with peers to

decide on the answers to tasks, exchange ideas and think critically. It was most remarkable that weaker students probably benefited most since they were helped by more capable ones in the group and the team spirit was evident.

Linked to this social collaboration is the development of the learners' autonomy and independence. Session by session the children became less teacher – dependent as they worked in small groups or pairs. They began to use dictionaries, encyclopedias, magazines and discovered things themselves. Although the teacher had selected the stories and had planned the tasks, she was no longer the dominant figure in the classroom but rather a 'facilitator' supporting learners only when needed.

The learners' evaluation of the story sessions

The students' reactions to the new course are of extreme importance as well. After the course the learners filled in a questionnaire in order to evaluate their own progress with the use of storybooks. The linguistic benefits the students acquired were also acknowledged by them. The vast majority admitted that the stories helped them develop their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and even memory.

What was most rewarding, however, was the fact that students extended their reading beyond the classroom. They read the storybooks at home again but also got engaged in reading other English and Greek books at home. On the whole, they viewed learning English with the help of a storybook as a fun, rewarding and challenging experience and expressed their willingness to continue this.

Further suggestions

The course lasted eight months. It seemed to be a challenging and rewarding experience for both the teacher and the students based on their observations and data collected. However, the limitations of this study should be taken into account and some suggestions be made.

Firstly, this case study seemed to work well with a particular group of students in a particular teaching context. It does not mean it would provide with the same results in all public or private schools all over Greece unless tried out. Secondly, in order to make generalizations, the story-based framework would have to be incorporated in the official course of study of the private or public school, from the first to the final year of tuition, and be tried out for a longer period of time to a larger number of learners. This means that some issues need to be taken into

consideration before the experimental study such as, the learners' needs, whether the story-based framework would run along with the coursebook framework, the number of hours that would be devoted to the stories, whether the class size and physical shape could serve story sessions, or how parents would react to the new approach.

Another limitation of this case study lies in the story-based framework itself. Unlike a coursebook which is always supplemented with components, a storybook is hardly accompanied by any other components other than a CD or a cassette. As a result, the teacher has to plan lessons, carefully devise tasks and activities with no guidance, which can be strenuous and time consuming, especially for inexperienced teachers.

Other than this, students were not involved in the story selection process. It would be a good idea for teachers to carry out a survey at the beginning of the school year asking students to suggest some stories they would like to be taught. This would enhance their motivation and interest to learn and make them more independent over their own learning.

Finally, more careful evaluation of the story sessions is necessary in order to come to conclusions. On the one hand, teachers could provide invaluable information while observing their classes regularly and more closely: for instance, keeping a class diary, with observations on students' reactions to the story and the class, completing self-assessment sheets on their own storytelling techniques, recording story sessions.

Conclusion

In conclusion this case study has addressed the question of using storybooks parallel to a coursebook to teach English effectively. In the present study, stories were manipulated as a learning tool for a group of fifteen eight to ten-year-old students in a private foreign language school in Greece and they seem to have improved their linguistic knowledge, communicative competence, social and cognitive development.

In short, this case study sought to provide a way to supplement a coursebook framework with stories in order to promote language acquisition in a challenging and enjoyable way. There is strong evidence to suggest that stories should be embraced by curriculum developers and be included in the school curriculum on a wider scale in

order to reveal their beneficial impact on promoting language acquisition.

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