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The Younger Learners column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

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Storytelling Activities for English Language Development of Future Japanese Preschool Teachers

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There is no mystery about how infants and toddlers come to understand the language spoken around them and begin speaking it for themselves. Across the world, young children's language ability develops from joint interaction with other speakers of the language in the course of everyday activities. Initially, this ability arises from children attending to language spoken (or signed) by others, especially by skilled adults, in situations where it has meaning or causes a noticeable change in the immediate context (Luria, 1979/1982; Luria & Yudovich, 1957/1971). To do more than merely understand what is said around them, and to increase their fluency, children must also be encouraged to speak in increasingly complex ways (Black, 2010, 2015). This holds true for preschoolers when learning to use an additional language.

In both EFL and regular preschool classes, the trained early childhood educator (ECE), in particular, can model more intricate utterances and reinforce those of children to further develop their speech through targeted activities (see Black, in press; Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Thus, preschoolers' language development moves along a continuum that begins with verbalizations about their immediate situation and later develops to include what they are not experiencing at the moment, for instance when retelling or creating original stories. Therefore, storytelling activities, where either the adult or the children tell the story, can be found in preschool curriculums across the world (Atkinson, 2019; Bodrova & Leong, 2007; May, 2011; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

Listening to stories helps children connect ideas with their experiences and visualize situations they may not have experienced yet. From repeatedly listening to tales, children learn routine patterns of discourse, new and more precise vocabulary, and "story grammar" (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Furthermore, Bodrova and Leong emphasize the role that storytelling plays in the development of a child's planned, thought-out actions. When children retell or create stories, they "are not absolutely free in their choice of episodes; the story must make sense to other people. In this way, storytelling is similar to play; both lead children from spontaneous to deliberate behaviors" (p. 155). In other words, storytelling also plays a role in the mental and behavioral development of children as their facility to use language simultaneously increases (see also Black, 2018a).

With younger preschoolers or lower-level EFL students, external props are often used to aid understanding. Such props can include the illustrations of a children's picture book, photographs, objects the teacher brings to class, puppets, and so on. In Japan, the traditional storytelling activity called *kamishibai* involves telling a story using a stack of illustrated cards, often set in a special frame, from which the top card is removed in turn as the story progresses.

With more proficient users of a language, the teacher can tell a story by only varying their vocal expression, facial expression, and by using some gestures. In this way, the children's attention is moved from concrete objects in the immediate situation to focus more solely on the spoken words which they actively make sense of in their own minds. There are some traditional storytelling activities in Japan which employ this technique. One is called *subanashi,* where a set script of a short folk tale is memorized by the teacher and told to the children using only vocal and facial expressions and some gestures to aid understanding. These examples demonstrate the long tradition of storytelling in early childhood education in Japan.

Teaching Context: Future ECEs in a Japanese University English Language Program

In 2017, I created a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) curriculum for the required Freshman and Sophomore English classes in the English language program of the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care at a Japanese university. This involved collecting and creating teacher resources and learning materials and conducting teacher development workshops. The majority of these university students will work in child care centers (*hoikuen)* and preschools (*youchien*) in Japan. The main goals of this curriculum are to increase the university students' English ability and further their knowledge and skills in the field of early childhood education (Black, 2018b).

Starting in 2017, an emphasis has been put on teaching English through the four skills, but with slightly more attention to speaking skills. Teachers are encouraged to do this in both the Speaking/Listening and Reading/Writing classes. I was curious whether students also perceived a need for or had a desire to improve their speaking in English. Therefore, in a questionnaire given to all first-year students (N = 84) in this department in January 2019, the free response question, "What are your goals for learning English? How do you imagine yourself using English in the future? あなたが英語を勉強する目標はなんですか?将来、どのように英語を使いたいと思いますか?仕事でもプライベートでもなんでもかまいませんので書いて下さい" was added to the questionnaire.

The responses to this question (82% response rate) were categorized into four broad categories. Twenty-nine percent said they needed to use English for travel or study abroad; 26% to talk with non-Japanese people or make friends with people from other countries; 22% envisioned themselves using English in some way in their future work with children; and for 13%, their goal was to be able to have everyday conversation and be able to speak and communicate in English. Ten percent of the responses did not fit into any of these four categories. These responses indicate that students' desire to improve their speaking skills is in line with the emphasis on this in the curriculum. Furthermore, as outlined above, storytelling is a usual, appropriate activity in Japanese early childhood education. Therefore, further activities involving oral storytelling were developed for the required Sophomore English classes; two are outlined below.

Rewriting and Performing Aesop's Fables as Puppet Shows (Sophomore Speaking/Listening Class, Intermediate Level)

The first activity involves the retelling of Aesop's fables in English. For this, Clark's (1995) *Story Cards: Aesop's Fables* were used. This is a set of 48 cards, one for each fable with an illustration of the fable on one side and the story written in English on the other. As these fables contain unfamiliar vocabulary and are written in a short, compact style that may not be readily understood by young children, the task for the university students was to rewrite them. They did this by adjusting the vocabulary, adding more details of the situation and dialogue, and creating visual materials such as stick puppets and two-dimensional scenery backgrounds, to accompany their telling of the fable.

Figure 1

Lion and the Gnat *Story Card* by Raymond C. Clark *(1995)*

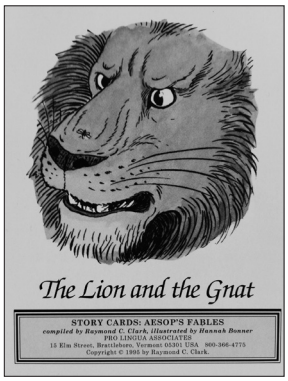
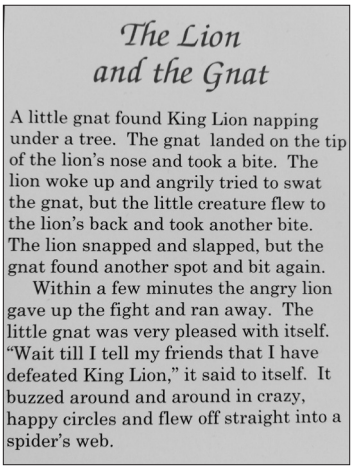


Figure 2

A Story Card from Lion and the Gnat *by Clark, R. C. (1995)*



The Lion and the Gnat

A little gnat found King Lion napping under a tree. The gnat landed on the tip of the lion's nose and took a bite. The lion woke up and angrily tried to swat the gnat, but the little creature flew to the lion's back and took another bite. The lion snapped and slapped, but the gnat found another spot and bit again.

Within a few minutes the angry lion gave up the fight and ran away. The little gnat was very pleased with itself. "Wait till I tell my friends that I have defeated King Lion," it said to itself. It buzzed around and around in crazy, happy circles and flew off straight into a spider's web.

Class Routine

- Class 1 (45 minutes): Introduce *Aesop's Fables.* Divide class into pairs or groups of three. Each group chooses a different fable to present. Students work with partner(s) to read and understand the fable, and then rewrite it adding more detail and dialogue, and adjusting vocabulary. When the script is finished, the teacher corrects it and offers suggestions for improvement. Students start planning and preparing visual materials.
- Homework: Finish script and make visual materials.
- Class 2 (45 minutes): Each group practices presenting their fables dramatically with their visual materials. The teacher offers suggestions for improvement, checks pronunciation and so on.
- Homework: Practice for presentation.
- Class 3 (45 minutes): Three or four groups simultaneously give their presentations to different small groups of listeners. After presenting, they rotate and perform their fable to a different group. In all, they present their fable 3-4 times, each time to a different group. Listeners take notes on the content of the fables and question presenters on parts that were unclear.
- Homework: Presenters write a self-evaluation of their performance (Appendix 1) and listeners choose two of the fables they have heard and write summaries of them from their notes.
- Class 4 (45 minutes): The listeners from the previous week are now the presenters and the routine above is repeated.

Observations and Points to Consider

Overall, the students were engaged in the activity and displayed creativity, especially in constructing the visual materials that they used as props. All made puppets for the characters in their fables by drawing the figures on construction paper, cutting them out, and attaching them to wooden disposable chopsticks. They also drew backdrops on A4-sized paper. For example, for the fable *Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* an extra flap of a sheepskin was made that the presenters could flip over to turn the wolf into a "sheep". Much discussion was also had about depicting the gnat in *The Lion and the Gnat*, for the gnat needed to be small, but still large enough to see. The final solution was a larger gnat as a stick puppet and a smaller gnat sticker that the presenters attached to the face of the lion during the story.

Though the pronunciation of some words was difficult at first, the main challenge for these students was to write dialogue for the characters that sounded natural and speak in a way that conveyed meaning through their intonation, use of emphasis, and volume of voice. Especially when they were manipulating the puppets while speaking, variation in expression was lacking. (See Appendix 2 for an example of teacher suggestions.) Another point that needed attention was their movement of the puppets. At first, they did not give the two-dimensional puppets any differentiated movements related to specific parts of the fable. This was discussed within the groups and suggestions arose to remedy this. Furthermore, since each group had three or four chances to perform their fable, by their final performance it was clear that meaning had been conveyed, as evidenced by the accuracy of the summaries written by listeners as homework.

Rewriting Fairy Tales and Reading Them Aloud (Sophomore Reading/Writing Class, Advanced Level)

The second activity involves the writing or rewriting of a fairy tale in English. Students had the option of rewriting a traditional Japanese folk tale, adapting a familiar European fairy tale, or creating a fairy tale of their own. The final part of this activity was to read their fairy tale aloud, in *subanashi* style, to small groups of peers and receive feedback on how to improve their story and presentation.

Class Routine

- Class 1 (90 minutes): Read aloud together *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone, 1973) with expression. Then, introduce and give some examples of key features of fairy tales. The ones I used were:
  1. Start with the set phrase: "Once upon a time there was (there were)," and end with "The end."
  2. Use past tense verbs.
  3. Use some onomatopoeia, or words that have a pronunciation that is similar to the word's meaning such as "creak" or "knock-knock."
  4. Repeat a few key phrases such as "I'm coming to gobble you up!" in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff.*
  5. Include dialogue between the characters, so when telling the story, distinct voices for each character need to be used.
  6. In traditional European fairy tales, things often happen in threes. For example, there are the stories of *The Three Little Pigs*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, and *The Three Billy Goats*

Gruff. Arrange the story so that similar things happen in three different ways or in three main parts.

7. Have the story implicitly teach children something important about life.

- Next, in groups of three or four, students write their own, original fairy tale, or retell in simple English a tale they already know. It should include all seven features listed above.
- Homework: Students finish writing their stories individually. Teacher corrects the stories.
- Class 2 (30 minutes): In the same groups as in the previous class, students help each other to revise their stories and practice reading them aloud with expression.
- Homework: Finish revising stories and practice reading them aloud.
- Class 3 (45 minutes): Students are placed in groups of three or four containing individuals from different groups. In this way, each person in the new group will be reading a different story. Students read their stories aloud and discuss them with members of their new group. They critique each story based on the use of the seven features and the quality of the spoken expression of the storyteller. Then, they discuss (or write) how the story could be made more understandable or interesting for children.

Observations and Points to Consider

There were some observations from the students' engagement in this activity that might need consideration. For example, most of the groups chose tales that are familiar ones in Japan: *Momo Taro*, *Urashima Taro* and so on. These are readily available in English translation elsewhere. However, this seemed to not be a problem. The students still had to modify the stories significantly to include the seven required features. Likewise, though the students worked on the task together in class, they completed it individually. Therefore, all their stories were a bit different. In addition, two groups created original stories. This was more difficult, but they also reported it was interesting for them. They remained engaged in the task, though it took them longer to complete. Finally, most students did not include all seven required features in their first draft, perhaps because of a lack of understanding of those features. Subsequently, the time spent revising in class with help from group members was productive.

Some difficulties also arose. As in the previous activity, students needed the most help with creating natural-sounding dialogue for the characters that was simple and easy to understand. Finding appropriate onomatopoeia for use in English-language storytelling was also a challenge until they discovered educational sites online with lists of such expressions and examples of their use on the website, Writerswrite (https://www.writerswrite.com/grammar/onomatopoeia/). Finally, it was difficult at first for the students to read their stories aloud with appropriate facial expression, varied intonation, and gestures, but they improved with practice and after receiving feedback from their peers.

Expansion of Cognitive Tasks: Adapting and Evaluating Learning Materials

From trying out these new activities with university students preparing to become ECEs, an area of further expansion was identified. Initially, the students' English language development was the primary goal for these activities. However, both activities also focus on aspects of certain cognitive tasks such as the adaptation and evaluation of learning materials for young children. For example, students had to evaluate the quality of others' stories, visual materials, and performances, and give their classmates suggestions for improvement. One way to help students give peer feedback is to create a list of appropriate sample comments that they can draw from in their discussions. (See Appendix 3 for an example). More emphasis could be placed on explicitly practicing these cognitive tasks.

The way language is used also continues to change. Therefore, the ability to update traditional stories for the inclusive and multicultural classroom would be useful and is another skill that could be practiced more extensively through such activities. Furthermore, culturally specific stories (see Challenger, 1999, 2004, for example), may not be so easily understandable to young children of different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, being able to adapt such tales would be a useful skill for ECEs. Another area for expansion would be to have students evaluate more deeply what lessons such tales may be trying to teach children and how such lessons can be best presented in one's current teaching context.

Finally, the emphasis here was on teachers telling stories to develop their own English speaking and ECE skills. However, as stated in the introduction, in order for preschoolers' language and concurrent thinking skills to develop, it is necessary for them to speak for themselves (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Therefore, adapting the activities and materials so that not only the teachers, but also the children, are able to tell such stories is another area for expansion.

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Appendix 1

Self-Evaluation of Short Presentation to Small Groups of Listeners

Name: **Student Number:**

Date:

	Excellent		*Average*		*Needs improvement*
a. Expressiveness, intonation	5	4	3	2	1
b. Pronunciation (no "*katakana* English"!)	5	4	3	2	1
c. Volume, pace, pausing	5	4	3	2	1
d. Confidence, physical presence, eye-contact	5	4	3	2	1
e. Use of visual materials, visibility for listeners	5	4	3	2	1
f. Quality of visual materials (easy to understand)	5	4	3	2	1

Below write a one paragraph self-evaluation of your presentation (75-150 words). Take into consideration the following questions:

1. What went well for you? Explain.
2. What do you need to improve?
3. What will you do differently next time when preparing for your presentation?
4. Explain in detail about the quality of your visual materials. How can you improve them next time?

You can start your paragraph like this:

Today I gave a presentation about the topic of _____ in class. First, there are some things that went well for me. For example...

Appendix 2

Example of Teacher Suggestions for an Aesop's Fable Presentation Script

The Lion and the Gnat

Student script:

- The lion: "**That is** enough! I don't care if you win, just go away!"
- The gnat: **"Yeah! I won!"**

Teacher suggestion:

- The lion: "*That's* enough! I don't care if you win, just go away!"
- The gnat: "Yeah! I won! *I won! I won, won, won, wonnnnnnnn!"*

Example of Teacher Suggestions for an Original Fairy Tale

The Three Fruit Boys

Once upon a time, an old man and an old woman lived in a certain place. One summer day, the old man went to the mountains to **mow the lawn**, and the old woman went to the river to do the laundry. As the old woman was doing the laundry in the river, **big melons were r**ushing down the river with a, "Zundoko Zundoko, Zundoko Zundoko" sound. "What's that? A big melon is floating down the river!" The old woman took it home, broke it open to eat it, and a boy came out from inside. **"I was surprised that a child was born from fruits,"** said the old woman. "**God has given a child to us who want children**," said the old man. The boy was named Melon Taro and **grew up well**.

- *cut some grass*
- *a large melon was*
- *"How surprising!" "A boy has come out of the melon!"*
- *"We really wanted a child. God has given us what we wished for."*
- *grew up to be a strong child*

Appendix 3

Suggested Format for Writing Summaries of Aesop's Fables

If you were a listener today, write summaries of two of your classmates' presentations of an Aesop's Fable. Each one should be 75-150 words long.

Summary Sample Format:

Title

Today, ___(names)__ gave a presentation on the Aesop's Fable titled _____.
This is a story about _____.
First _____. Next, _____ _____ _____. Then, _____. _____ _____. After that, _____. Finally, ___ _____ ___. In conclusion, children can learn _____ _____ from this story.

[JALT PRAXIS] BOOK REVIEWS


Robert Taferner & Stephen Case

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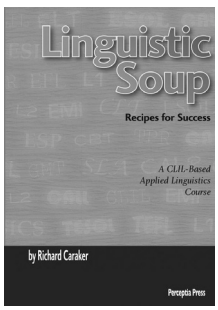
Linguistic Soup: Recipes for Success

[Richard Caraker. Nagoya: Perceptia Press, 2020. pp. 101. ¥2,530. ISBN: 9784939130281.]

Reviewed by Martin Hawkes, The University of Shiga Prefecture



As someone who teaches both an introductory second language acquisition (SLA) class and an applied linguistics seminar, I know that it can be a challenge to find and create appropriate materials. Textbooks published overseas and aimed at students in countries where English is the dom-