Storytelling: Practice makes Perfect (Workshop)

X.TED ELT Conference, at TED Mersin College 28th April 2018

Picture Book Storytelling: Hints and Tips

These are practical storytelling tips, with the emphasis on reading for pleasure. For more on subjects like 'why read stories?', and 'choosing books' contact the author (details below).

Make it fun!

- Children will want to read if they think it will be fun; when you read, show that you think so, too!
- Don't slow down the story by making constant teaching points, especially the first time you tell it
- Don't always use follow-up activities. Tell plenty of stories just for pleasure, with no other motive
- If children see stories as just 'part of studying', will they keep reading when they leave school?

Always prepare

- Before you use a book, read it aloud – perhaps to a friend or family. Choose ones that you enjoy
- Are there any unusual words? You might explain these before you begin, to save interruptions
- Are there opportunities for joining-in? Repeated phrases, choruses, animal noises, etc.
- Are pictures clear enough for all to see? What things might you point out, or ask them to look for?
- Could you use a puppet, or an object, to help tell the story?

Right from the Start

- Choose a quiet area, away from interruptions. Children should face away from doors and windows
- Young children can be on the floor (use rugs, cushions). Sit on a chair, so that all can see the book
- Talk about the book (cover, author). What sort of story might it be? (But don't overdo this!)
- Write up names of characters, objects etc. - perhaps using drawings to explain what you mean
- Explain if you're going to ask for participation. You could rehearse it, first.

Bringing it Alive

- Hold the book open, to one side of you; move it gently to and fro so that all can see
- Speak clearly and slowly; vary the tone, pitch and volume of your voice
- Try different voices for different characters: 'Low for giants and elephants, high for princesses'!
- You could follow the words with your finger, to show text direction and individual words
- Occasionally invite children to predict ('What might happen next?')
- Use a sense of drama. Exaggerate a little. Make the most of the story's climax
- Relax, smile at the children, join in with silly choruses and noises! They'll laugh with you, and love it
- Make eye contact, and let your facial expressions echo the story. Use gestures with your 'free hand'
- Keep the story gently moving. Don't turn every page into a 'What's that?' quiz. On the other hand...
- If children ask about details in the pictures, don't ignore them.

Holding interest – and Interruptions!

- Some children will concentrate less. Give them extra stories, to bring them to the level of others
- Use children's names, to bring back their attention, or move a little towards them
- Invite a disruptive child to sit next to you, or give them a job ('You can be my page-turner')
- Don't raise your voice, or the atmosphere will be broken.
- Use active poems and rhymes to 'de-wriggle'. If a story doesn't work, be prepared to stop.

A Happy Ending

- Pause, and enjoy the moment of a satisfying ending. With luck, you'll hear 'Again!'
- Let follow-up happen naturally. Often children will act out stories unbidden, during their playtime
- If a story worked well, look for sequels, others by the same author, and so on.

And finally…

- Add to the picture books by stories you were told as a child, stories from memory, family stories, etc.
- Remember that stories can bring alive all other areas of the curriculum too.

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