

The Roles of Story-Based Practices in Intercultural Education

Yusuke Kida

Graduate School of Education Chiba University

ykidaa@chiba-u.jp

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the effect of a story-based practice on the attitudes of elementary school learners with regard to tolerating differences in others. The subjects of the study were three classes of fifth grade public elementary school students in Japan (n=113), who had been learning English since the first grade.

The story-based practice incorporated intercultural activity relating to a story, and the activity was conducted once in each class for forty minutes. For the purposes of the study, participants wrote a reflection sheet during and after the class.

The study yielded several results. First, although the way in which the characters in the story behaved was controversial, the learners either accepted the characters positively or reflected on themselves comparing themselves with the characters. Second, through the intercultural activity they did during the story-based practice, the learners shared their own ideas with each other. This helped them to see that every individual may have different ideas about the same situation, a concept that they found interesting.

The experience enabled the learners to relate to the subject matter of the story and to share their individual ideas and values with each other. It is hoped that the implementation of story-based practice will afford young learners the opportunity to understand and emphasize with each other's thoughts and views.

Keywords

Intercultural Education, Story-Based Practice, Foreign Language Activities

English education in Japan

In Japan, English was introduced in

elementary schools as a Foreign Language Activity in 2008. From 2011, it was implemented in the fifth and sixth grades with one lesson per week, 35 lessons per year, by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Six years have passed since these Foreign Language Activities were implemented in the curriculum for the public elementary schools. In 2018, a new program for English education will be introduced into the current curriculum in the elementary schools. The children will start to learn the English language in the third grade, and they will also begin studying English as an academic subject.

Intercultural education

Course of Study (2008) enumerates that the main goals of foreign language activities are: to learn about the differences between ways of living, customs and events in Japan and in foreign countries; to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking; to experience communication with people of different cultures and; to deepen the understanding of culture.

It is important for children to understand that different people see things differently and that it is important to be tolerant of others (Pinter, 2006). A tolerant attitude is one of the components of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), as outlined in the intercultural communication section of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

According to Mizokami and Shibuya (2009): 1. English communication promotes intercultural understanding, 2. For intercultural understanding, understanding one's own culture are necessary, 3. Intercultural understanding means understanding foreign cultures. They conclude that the purpose of intercultural education through foreign language education is to acquire an attitude that is tolerant of differences

and to recognize that one's own culture or way of thinking is but one of a diverse multitude.

Teaching English as Story telling

In foreign language activity classes, teachers sometimes use stories. Although the aim of using a story can vary, stories "can provide an ideal introduction to foreign language as they present language in a familiar and memorable context" (Ellis & Brewster, 2002, p1). Encountering stories is one of the best ways for children to not only learn a language but also learn about content, cultural aspects, and how to solve everyday problems. "Stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go" (Cameron, 2001, p.159).

With regard to intercultural understanding, stories give children opportunities to encounter varied situations, personalities, and worlds. The interaction and communication that takes place through stories is a great influence on the development of children's ability to communicate in order to build relationships, and their ability to form their personalities.

Method

The subjects of the study were three classes of fifth grade public elementary school students in Japan (n=113), who had been learning English since first grade.

The story-based practice incorporated intercultural activity relating to a story, and the activity was conducted once for each class for forty minutes. For the purposes of the study, participants wrote a reflection sheet during and after the class. The reflection sheets were then collected and used to analyze the participants' opinions of the story's characters, themselves, and their friends as the story unfolded. The analysis was carried out using a sensitivity analysis program, IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys.

Conclusion

The results of this study are as follows. First, although the characters' behavior in this story was controversial, the learners accepted them positively or compared the characters with

themselves and used them to reflect on themselves. Second, through the intercultural activity during the story-based practice, the learners shared their own ideas. They found that they each had different ideas about the same situation; they reported that they thought that this fact was interesting.

In this study, although the practice was conducted only once, for only forty minutes, learners found that different people think or see things differently. As the result of story, the learners encountered the variety of ideas and values. Thus story-based practices can give young learners opportunities to share the various thoughts of other people.

References

- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching language to young learners*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, G. & Brewster, J. (2002). *Tell it again! The new storytelling handbook for primary teachers*. London, UK: Penguin & Longman.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and technology (MEXT). (2008). An explanatory note for foreign language activities in course of study for elementary school. Tokyo, Japan: Toyokan Publishing.
- Mizokami, Y. & Shibata, N. (2009). Cross-cultural understanding and foreign language education: as one type of the liberal arts education. *Aichi Konan University Bulletin*.
- Pike, G. & Selby, D. (2001). *In the global classroom 2*. Toronto, Canada: Pippin Publishing Corporation.
- Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.