

# Teaching *The Three Little Pigs* to EFL Young Learners in Taiwan

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Picture books have been recognized as an effective aid for first and second language learning because they cover rich, authentic and beautiful language, especially with rhythmic refrains and repetitive sentence patterns. Few EFL studies demonstrated using multiple techniques on teaching folktales to EFL young learners in Taiwan. Therefore, the main purpose of the paper was to show how young learners in Taiwan learned English effectively when they were exposed to such repetitive features of folktales by using multiple techniques. The multiple teaching techniques included presenting the picture book, using flash cards, showing sentence stripes, playing puppets for story drama, playing the chosen story CD, reading aloud, role play, choral speaking/chanting, and singing songs with action. The finding showed that the use of multiple teaching techniques in teaching this folktale had strong effect on increasing young learners' English listening and speaking performance. It indicates that it is effective for teachers to apply multiple ways to present folktales in order that young learners would be interested in and be familiar with the folktale content.

## Introduction

Children's literature has been important and successfully applied in elementary and middle schools in United States. Children's books contain beautiful language, which can provide students with good models to practice and increase their language skills (Allen, 1989; Cullinan & Galda, 1994; Rothlein & Meinbach, 1991). Previous researchers further stress that good literature for children cannot only help English native speakers but also young ESL learners acquire English effectively (Allen, 1989).

For example, listening to favorite nursery rhymes, stories and songs usually works for first language acquisition. Choral speaking/chanting and singing are effective teaching techniques to teach young learners children's books. Unlike drilling, it's natural for L1 learners to join in with repeated refrains, anticipating key events and enchanting rhyming. Then students can internalize routines and patterns with or without consciously committing them to the retention of language (Richard-Amato, 1988). Many "chunks" of useful language can be incorporated into the individual's linguistic repertoire and can subsequently improve their English proficiency. The use of prosodic elements, redundancy, and repetition could also help ESL/EFL learners lower their anxiety and increase their greater ego permeability (Allen, 1989, 1994; Richard-Amato, 1988).

Among children's books, we can see that folktales are the ones that cover all of these features: repetitive language, repetitive sentence patterns, rhythmic refrains, and are usually predictable for language learning and amusement. However, how can we teach young EFL learners effectively? How can we help them enjoy learning English? For instance, choral speaking/chanting and singing activities can provide EFL learners with opportunities to play with language. Therefore, the aim was to demonstrate the effects of using multiple teaching techniques on teaching one folktale to EFL young learners, especially on English speaking and listening.

## Picture Books Are Effective for Language Learning

Among children's books, there are many advantages in using picture books for language learning. Firstly, the advantage of using picture books is that the pictures offer the students a way to understand what the teacher is reading, even if they do not know the word in the story context (Nantz, 2002). Furthermore, picture books contain rich language because they are usually well designed so as to be read aloud to children long before they are read individually by children (Cullinan & Galda, 1994).

Thus, linguistically, picture books can help students master the vocabulary and grammar as well as the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Stern, 1991). In addition, picture books can not only provide authentic materials but also support curriculum and understand the other cultures (Allen, 1989; 1994). Last, pictures can elicit students' interest, excitement and discussion. Therefore, picture books should be effective for teaching EFL young learners.

# Folktales: Repetitive Sentence Patterns, Rhythmic Refrains, and Predictable

Folktales always play very important roles in the processes of language learning because folktales usually contain repetitive language patterns, phrases, or questions, refrains, strong rhythm and rhyme, sequences of numbers or days of the week (Cooper & Collins, 1992; Cullinan & Galda, 1994; Hill, 1999; Kowalski, 2002; Mallan, 1992; Nodelman, 1996). For example, repetitive patterns can be the schema for students' comprehension of the children's stories and predicting the action in the plot and the ending (Allen, 1989; Nodelman, 1996). In addition, folktales make it easy for students to remember the vocabulary and grammatical structures contained in them (Kowalski, 2002). Additionally, with repeated refrains, it's natural for learners to join in enchanting rhyming and that can help them be familiar with sound patterns and thus increase their listening ability.

Among folktales, *The Gingerbread Man* is a good, cumulative story, because the important feature of cumulative stories is that elements (things, people or experiences) are added as the story progresses, through stories, with a degree of familiarity students naturally have certain expectations of story structure, language and patterns (Mallan, 1992). For example, the cumulative story with a repetitive pattern is like *The Gingerbread Man*:

I've run away from a little old woman, a little old man, and a cow...  
I've run away from a little old woman, a little old man, a cow, and a horse.

The recurring phrases or events can aid their understanding and memory (Mallan, 1992). Because of their particular story patterns, cumulative stories can also offer children the chances to engage in language play by chanting or singing the repeated story events as follows:

Run, run, as fast as you can!  
You can't catch me.  
I'm the Gingerbread Man.

Through hearing stories, students can learn to appreciate the beauty and rhythm of language (Cooper & Collins, 1992). Teachers are usually amazed at how quickly children "chime in" when a story has a refrain (Cooper & Collins, 1992) such as *Three Little Pigs*:

Little Pig, Little Pig, let me come in! Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin!

Another story, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, has rhythmic refrain as follows:

Trip, trap;  
Trip, trap;  
Trip, trap," went Little Billy Goat Gruff's hooves on the bridge.

These rhythmic refrains above, obviously, are easily memorized when students chant or singing together. Based on review, when children listen to stories, verse, prose of all kinds, they could unconsciously be familiar with the repeated rhythms and structure, the cadences and conventions of the various forms of written language (Chalmers, 1973). This phonemic awareness is a formalized extension of the language awareness that has been developed at the first level through listening to repetitive language patterns or rhythmic refrains from stories, poetry, rhyme, and songs (Nantz, 2002). In a result, folktales is a good tool for EFL young learners' language learning.

# Teaching *Three Little Pigs* by Using Multiple Techniques

*Three Little Pigs* was taught to EFL kindergarten students in Tainan City in Taiwan. All the students had already studied English in private language institutes. and therefore, pre-test and post-test were needed to understand how much students learned in our teaching experiment.

Before teaching, it took us, me and my teaching assistant, five weeks to prepare for this teaching experiment, including finding one appropriate fairy tale, designing speaking and listening tests for pre-test and post-test, contacting any school for participating in this experiment, and arranging teaching schedule. Moreover, we adapted our storybook to fit those young learners' English levels and designing lesson plans.

I recorded and observed the class by reflection notes, DVD, and students' scores from speaking and listening tests. In order to know the effect of this teaching experiment on young learners' English listening and speaking, a dependent t-test was utilized to reveal the difference between pre-test and post-test.

## Multiple Teaching Techniques

The multiple teaching techniques included presenting the picture book, using flash cards, showing sentence stripes, playing puppets for story drama, playing the chosen story CD, reading aloud, role play, choral speaking/chanting, and singing songs with action.

## The Folktale: *Three Little Pigs*

The chosen folktale was *Three Little Pigs*. It a picture book from the Reading House series, published by Caves Books Ltd in Taiwan. The series of classical tales introduce basic structures, sentence patterns, and common vocabulary regularly recycled for easy acquisition. The CD has significant features of a drama, chants and songs especially composed for the story. There repetitive language, sentence patterns, and rhythmic refrains, which are chanted and sung in an appealing way. For instance, the excerpts of *Three Little Pigs* are in the following:

### Excerpt One:

One, two, three, the three little pigs.  
One, two, three, the three little pigs.  
House, house, a new house,  
I want to build a new house.  
Straw, straw,  
Dog has some straw.  
Straw, straw,  
Please give me some straw.  
I want to build a house of straw.

### Excerpt Two:

One, two, three, the three little pigs.  
One, two, three, the three little pigs.  
House, house, a new house,  
I want to build a new house.  
Sticks, sticks,  
Goat has some sticks.  
Sticks, sticks,  
Please give me some sticks.

I want to build a house of sticks.

### **Excerpt Three:**

One, two, three, the three little pigs.

One, two, three, the three little pigs.

House, house, a new house,

I want to build a new house.

Bricks, bricks,

Bear has some bricks,

Bricks, bricks,

Please give me some bricks.

I want to build a house of bricks.

## **Listening and Speaking Performance Before Class and After Class**

Based on students test scores of pre-test and post-test, there was a greatly significant difference before and after teaching these young learners *Three Little Pigs* through repetitive words, repetitive sentence patterns, and rhythmic refrains by using multiple techniques. The significance shows in Table 1.

## **The Effects of Using Multiple Techniques on Teaching**

In the practical teaching, the utilization of multiple teaching techniques in teaching repetitive sentence patterns and rhythmic refrains of the folktale had strong effect on teaching young learners English listening and speaking. It indicates that it is effective for teachers to apply multiple ways to present folktales in order that young learners would be interested in and be familiar with the story content. Firstly, students got great improvement in listening as well as in speaking. Furthermore, young learners were comfortable with familiar folktales, which could decrease their anxiety. Some students seemed very nervous before starting learning English. It was very obvious that they looked relaxed when they knew that they wanted to learn the story, *Three Little Pigs*.

In addition, the story interested young learners so that they would absorb themselves in the story content. For instance, every time when the puppet, the big wolf showed up, young learners were nervous but excited. They would be eager to talk and participate in class. They enjoyed imitating the voice of the big wolf, too.

Moreover, playing puppets could stimulate them to be excited and to be willing to participate in role-playing. When the teaching assistant played the puppets, students would particularly pay attention to her and do role-play with her. For instance, when she said, "Please give me some bricks. I want to...", they would automatically say, "build a new house."

Although some sentences were too long for young learners to learn, it was effective to break down long sentences into prosodic elements for students to learn. Then the students were taught to chant and sing, such as "In! In! Come in! Let me come in. Little pig, little pig, let me come in." "Puff! Puff! Blow your house down." They easily memorized and retained the content through chanting and singing. The finding supports that choral speaking/chanting is a safe way and an interesting activity (Cross, 1999; Cullinan & Galda, 1994; Hill, 1999; Richard-Amato, 1988; Rothlein & Meinbach, 1991).

Doing action, which young learners enjoyed very much, was also a stimulating tool to remind them of the content. With this fun action activity, they could be more familiar with the music and sing songs better. It's more fun than reading aloud only; therefore, young learners had such high participating in class. For example, when the teaching assistant played music, they would start to sing and do the action automatically.

Last, the teaching assistant helped the children to identify repetitive lines and to point out repetitive words. She further motivated children to recognize rhyming words and elicit them to reproduce the repetitive words by playing games.

## **Conclusion**

In Taiwan, it's common for EFL teachers to teach grammar and English conversation to learners of different ages by utilizing EFL textbooks. Few EFL teachers apply folktales in their classroom teaching systematically. The results in the study demonstrate how to effectively apply various techniques in teaching folklores in EFL setting through their features, such as the repetitive sentence patterns and rhythmic refrains. Young learners acquired language unconsciously, with their whole attention engaged by using those different teaching techniques, in much the same way as they acquired their mother tongue. However, applications of folktales for classroom use doesn't appear magically; therefore, it is critical for EFL teachers in Taiwan to learn diverse techniques in the application of using different levels of folktales to teach learners of different ages.

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