# Telling True Stories: Blending Multimedia in a Task-based Activity

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# Introduction

According to Stone (1991), the role of task-based activities is to provide learners to use the target language contextually through situational activities. In this project, the students  are asked to perform various tasks that require the use of all four-language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking with emphasis on performing communicative activities (see also Crandall, 1994 and Harmer, 1991). This activity requires the use of a computer laboratory with Internet access that will accommodate 25 students (see notes 1), an LCD projector that will project images as they appear on the computer monitor, and the installation of Yahoo Messenger , a free software program that is available on the Internet. The incorporation of multimedia and the Internet makes this a blended learning activity, which adds versatility and creates a different route to learning and teaching EFL.

# The Activity

The lesson plan is heavily influenced by a lesson that was selected from the archive available at esl.about.com (see Notes 2), and was used as a platform for this class activity, which was divided into three phases, 1) pre-online chat, 2) during chat, and 3) post-online chat activity.

# The Lesson Plan

Telling true stories is a basic English usage task that is used on a daily basis. Unfortunately, students struggle with their grammar usage while speaking the English language that they wind up being less understandable. A typical story telling structure outline consists of introduction, beginning, the story, the end and the moral lesson of the story.

## Aims of the Lesson

1. To learn the basic structure and expressions used when telling true stories.
2. To engage in a chat activity with a native speaker of English, that will require the use of all four language skills
3. To enhance the students' oral communications by giving them plenty of opportunities to use the English language in an authentic manner.

## Implementing the Activity

### Step 1: Pre-Online Chat

Time: 10-15 minutes

1. A short lecture and discussion about telling true stories
2. Gather student's opinions and experiences about the topic

### Step 2: Voice Conference with Students

Time: 1 hour

1. Choose 5-10 volunteers. Ask the volunteers to log on to Yahoo Messenger and open Yahoo Messenger's chat conference capable of broadcasting voice. Invite all participants by clicking the 'Invite to conference'. Once all the participants have entered the chat conference, you may proceed with the chat activity.
2. The students who are offline can still participate by watching the big screen where images from the chat conference are projected via an LCD projector. The offline Ss could see, read and understand what's going on in the voice/text conference (see figure 1).
3. Ask the guest speaker (a native speaker) to begin sharing her/his story to the class by either typing on the keyboard or using Yahoo's voice feature (see Notes 3).
4. After the guest speaker has shared her/his story, the students take turns in asking questions or posting their comments/opinions.
5. The interaction between the students and the native speaker should be spontaneous and natural as much as possible.
6. After the chat, save the chat log before closing the voice conference interface. The log can be used for assessment purposes and a material for peer feedback.

**Step 3: Offline Post-chat Activity**

Time allocation: 1 hour

1. Follow up your guest speaker's story with some basic comprehension questions to check whether the whole class understands her/his story (see Notes 4).
2. Ask the students to reflect and think of a situation that they have experienced (see Notes 5). The nature of the story could be one or combination of the following: happy, sad, scary, inspirational, suspense, etc.
3. Ask the students to plan and write a true story of about 100 words.
4. The written work can be printed out or uploaded in the class's Yahoo groups' Files area.

**Step 4: Students Telling Their Own True Stories**

Time allocation: 1 hour

1. After composing their stories, students take turns in sharing their stories to the whole class.
2. Students may be allowed to look at their notes but try to encourage spontaneous delivery.

# Conclusion

The tasks given serve as means to achieve the aims of the lesson. And by combining a blended approach to learning EFL, offers not only the crossing of boundaries and cultural dimensions but it also creates a different milieu that cannot be recreated in a regular classroom.

## Notes:

1. If you have more than 25 students in class, then you may divide them into groups and create a second online session.
2. About ESL.com (http://esl.about.com/library/lessons/nbltellingstories.htm), a website for ESL (English as a Second Language)/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and teachers
3. Yahoo tends to be unstable when there are more that 12 online participants. The connection speed will depend on the computer's bandwidth and Internet access. If you lose voice or any of your Ss are unable to hear any sound, then I suggest that you settle for a text-based chat. Instead of clicking or pressing the 'Talk' icon on Yahoo's voice conference interface, ask the participants to simply type on the keyboard.
4. You may touch on the moral lesson of the story by invoking questions such as, 'What did you learn from it?' or "If you were him/her, would you have done the same thing?"
5. The time in which the event/s occurred is not important, as long as it happened in the past.

# References

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http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Yeh-TrueStories.html