

Dear Maria,

Here at last.

I look forward to seeing the publication , in due course.

Mario.

Telling Stories in the Language Classroom ( Goiania )

by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims. UK.

I do not have the skill to describe the feeling that gradually built up over this four day workshop in a city on the centre of Brazil last July. I do not have the writing know-how to describe to you how people met each other powerfully and tenderly via the stories they told each other.

I would have to be a Garcia Marquez to weave the texture of that workshop as I perceive it in my memory.

All I can do is be an efficient methodologist and offer you some of the scenarios used in the workshop for you to try out in your own classrooms. Then you can enjoy with your students another very different feeling in some way parallel to my animator joy in that Goiania group, now a group only in each of us participants' memories.

1. You, the teacher, tell the story of your hair. You take the group through your hair's autobiography from early childhood to the present day. While doing this you fill the board with vocab items that you need in order to tell your hair's story.

In fours, ask them to tell each other the autobiography of their hair.

2. You do exactly the same with a scar you have got. You tell the story of how you got the scar and fill the board with the vocabulary of accidents, pain, hospital etc... Maybe ask two students to tell their scar stories in front of the group so you can help with more words and get them up on the board. This way, when the pairs come to tell their stories, they will have plenty of the lexis they need up on the board.

3. Tell the students a minimalist dream-like story like this:

“ She was walking towards a house and a fog was coming towards the house too.

As she reached the house the fog did too. It wrapped itself round her and the house.

She knew she wanted to go in. She went in and sat down. There was a little mist in the house.

There were sad feelings.

She did not know what happened ..... but suddenly she woke up and bright sunlight was streaming in through the windows.”

Pair the students and ask them to speak of whatever this tiny story evokes in them.

4. Give the students three words, eg

WOMAN    LORRY    SNAKE

Tell them to work on their own and produce a 5 sentence story incorporating the three words.

Get students to read out their stories round the group.

This can be done at any level between post beginner and advanced. ( the beginner will struggle to find minimal words while the advanced person will be hard put to cram all of her story into 5 sentences.

- 5 Tell a bi-lingual story to beginners in which the matrix of the story is in L1 and some carefully selected words come in L2. Supposing I am want to teach English speakers Portuguese I might start my story this way:

“ I want to tell you the story of the Homen do Leme....Homen means “man” and homen do leme means “steersman”. So, as I was saying, this steersman, this homen do leme, lived in a small aldeia, on the shores of the great mar. This particular mar is more than 3000 miles across. There were many more mulheres , women, in that aldeia than homens, as so many of the homens had been drowned in the great gray mar. Now, it so happened, that on the day my story starts the homen do leme was.....”

In your case, with your students ,you would just reverse the languages.

This technique is great with 7 year-olds and great with adults and with all ages in between.

One course participant told us he made central use of this technique in teaching tiny tots in their homes on a one-to-one basis. He showed us how he does it and wowed us with his total expertise in the area. Watch out for a man called Uribe.

6. Have the students stand in a circle. Ask them to imitate your gestures and to echo all your words. (“ echo” means repeat not more than one or two syllables behind the speaker )

Lead them through a very short bit of action with a beginning, a middle and an end. I think I

used a text I learnt from Bernard Dufeu ( author of Teaching Myself, OUP 94 )

“ Look, look, how beautiful !

Wow! What a marvellous rose.

What amazing beauty!

I want to pick it..... ( kneeling down on one knee )

OW!.....(standing up again ) Blood!

But... look how beautiful the rose is.....

I want to pick it....

( picks it ) What a marvellous smell! “

7. Perhaps the most beautiful exercise we used in the workshop was “ A story that represents you”.

I told the group a story that represents me, or at least one aspect of me :

“ Do you know how it is the sherpas manage to carry vast weights over high passes in the Himalayas ? They will carry up to 80 kilos over 20 kms a days in terrain you would not believe. They have a very simple technique. First they strap the burden on and then they place medium-sized rock on top of it. They carry the rock and the burden together for the first one and half kilometres. They then fling the rock down a ravine and for the next 19 kms the burden feels light.”

For me this story is central to my ways of thinking about self-management. It is a brilliant example of clever re-framing.”

Having told your students a story you feel represents you, you ask each of them to come to the next meeting with one that represents them, individually.

They tell their stories in groups of four. When we did this in Goiania, some of us were close to tears.

You may say: “are these all the techniques you used in a four day workshop?” and the answer is

“ no “ but the 800 words Maria Brown has allowed me are up!

If you want to know more about this area look at John Morgan’s ONCE UPON A TIME, CUP,

1983 or Andrew Wright’s two books for small ones: CREATING STORIES

WITH CHILDREN and STORY TELLING WITH CHILDREN, both recent and both published by OUP.

Best of all, make sure you get to next year's Laurels Conference so you can live things rather than read about their pale shadows.

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