CREATIVE DIALOGUES-Storyline Approach

Paşek Ionela-profesor limba engleză
Școala Gimnazială"Constantin Săvoiu"Tg.-Jiu, Gorj

The Storyline approach was first developed by a small group of staff tutors based in the In-service Department of what was then Jordanhill College of Education, Glasgow, Scotland - now the Faculty of Education of the University of Strathclyde. People involved at that time were Steve Bell, Sallie Harkness and Fred Rendell.

The Storyline method provides a structure for planning classroom experience which gives the teacher the security of knowing what knowledge, skills and attitudes she/he intends pupils to acquire. It also provides practical implementation strategies which have proven workable with classes, groups and individuals. The approach is sequential, in the method, thus ensuring progression as the chosen topic unfolds. There is also, however, flexibility in that, as the Storyline process continues, the pupils' responses are an essential part of the development.

A key feature of the approach is the very positive way in which it depends on and builds on pupils" existing experience and knowledge. Also significant is the degree of pupil involvement, both imaginatively and in practical problem solving. The Storyline method poses problems and asks questions of pupils rather than giving them answers to questions they have never asked. The pupils and the teacher explore ideas together. The approach is essentially experiential and constructivist. It draws the curriculum together using the environment and social subjects as a stimulus to explore, using expressive arts and language as a means of discussing, describing and explaining. Research and reference skills are extended as pupils are encouraged to search for answers and information in various ways...orally, through viewing of slides, videotapes, etc., by use of data bases and through study of books, posters and photographs. As topics are developed pupils record their ideas, understandings and responses in visual and written formats thus creating powerful classroom displays as well as individual files of work. Both of these enable the process of review and evaluation when the storyline is completed. As the level of pupil commitment is increased parents may become involved in a number of positive ways, such as a visiting witness or "expert," to take part in the celebration of the climax of a topic study, to assist and supervise on a visit out of school, to be a classroom helper during practical activities and to help create displays of pupils" work.

Storyline and learning a foreign language

The necessity of lifelong learning is inextricably linked to a successful language learning process. An experienced foreign language teacher knows that learners must constantly improve their speaking competence. He is well aware of the fact that this is a continuous aspect of the learning process. The learner finds himself

at various stages of the language learning process which are close to near native competence in the target language. However, he hardly ever achieves the same level of fluency and accuracy of a native speaker. Should one strive for perfection in a foreign language when learners already have problems trying to achieve the same level of competence in their mother tongue?

The learner avoids coming to a halt in his language learning by working his way through the various stages. Errors will be a constant feature of his learning. These are inseparable elements of language development and should not worry the teacher as long as the content and intention are conveyed. Werner Bleyhl (2002:7) states that learning a foreign language is an ability to interact "based on understanding people, texts and situations". He also points out that this process aims at "human interrelations and the acquisition of sensitivity for a hands-on approach and the faculty to express oneself, without forgetting tact and subtle intuition". Communicative competence is determined and achieved by diverse and interwoven processes when individuals interact with each other. In foreign language teaching we need approaches that encourage such development. The learner has to make sure that the content and intention of his speech are clear and at the same time be able to decipher the messages communicated to him. He must become familiar with discourse in situations close to reality. This can be done successfully with the Storyline Approach. While working on a Storyline, it is necessary to create an open environment in which a variety of social interaction and experiences are possible. In creating such an environment, the content is the focus and the learner has the opportunity to free himself of the fear of making mistakes and at the same time, the fear of taking risks with the language. The learner behaviour described must be accepted by all foreign language teachers and be supported. Nowadays, we know that the goal is not only linguistic knowledge but also competence in speaking. We have also learned that the sequence of learning grammatical structures cannot be changed by lessons and that grammatical progression in this context is not particularly helpful.

Storyline and the Learning Situation
Combination of thought and action

The combination of thought and action which are characteristics of Storyline, will provide every pupil with the opportunity to draw on his individual ability, skills and experiences and consequently be more aware of his own learning competence. This integrative model "which aims at topic-centred, integral and cross-curricular learning and working in classes" (Fehse 1995: 35) creates a sound basis for individual learning and differentiated teaching. Furthermore, while working on a Storyline, the pupils produce materials to which they feel attached and which are not regarded as typical and nor commercially-produced. The pupils show pride in what they have created and can identify with the characters and objects they have invented. Subsequently, the pupils" motivation to engage further with the Storyline is significantly increased. The development of positive learning and study habits are encouraged within such a learning context because everybody feels involved. It can

also reduce the occurrence of certain "secondary problems" e. g. over-motivation and related unfulfilled expectations, the experience of failure or the inhibition to speak. These factors should be taken into consideration as the learner"s motivation is without doubt a relevant criterion for successful teaching and learning.

Emotions

Emotions play a very important role in the acquisition of a foreign language. According to Ernst Apeltauer (1997: 105) they are important" because they steer the cognitive processing and facilitate memorizing. They can also have a negative effect by causing fears and inhibitions in speaking or by encouraging the production of mistakes". The opportunity to support those emotional factors that facilitate the learning process should be emphasized when working with a Storyline. The pupils feel reassured because everybody can contribute to the end product. At times, it is not unusual for them to discover strengths they were not aware of and which might not have been detected within a more traditional teaching approach. The belief in one"s own ability and in those of others often increases. The teacher consequently has the opportunity to get to know his pupils better. Mutual trust grows which is beneficial, as an atmosphere of trust can reduce inhibitions, foster better language assimilation and encourages the learner to form more complex inter-language.

Authenticity

The creation of an optimal learning situation with Storyline is not only determined by the factors cited above. A very important additional aspect is authenticity. The contrived nature of learning is the result of separating the learning that takes place in school from real life situations. This aspect can be successfully counteracted by a Storyline approach. The Storyline Approach is orientated towards authenticity, without which the learner will not perform. The reality created allows each pupil to participate. Howard Gardner states (2002: 261): "Because the genes and experiences of every person are unique and our brain is geared to work/make out sense, there is no ego, no awareness, and no thought which resembles that of somebody else completely. So everyone of us has been created as an individual and un-reproducible possibility to enrich the world".

Conclusion

When you reflect on the Storyline Approach you should not forget the linguistic aspects. Working on a Storyline enables the learners to create their own story although it is initiated and guided by the teacher. Oral production is a direct consequence of authentic language use as the learners bring lots of independent ideas which have their origins in real life. These ideas offer new stimuli for the development of discreet language skills. By designing a Storyline and guiding the whole process with related key questions, oral objectives are not randomly set but are in line with the syllabus. Due to the fact that those objectives are an implicit part of

the Storyline, the learners may not suspect that they are being taught the next unit of work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bell, S. (1998) *Storyline Scotland.* Available at http://www.storyline-scotland.freeserve.co.uk

Creative Dialogues (2003-2006) http://www.creativedialogues.lernetz.de

Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe, 2006
Content and Language Integrated Learning at School in Europe,

Fehse, K. and Kocher, D. (2002) „Storyline projects in the foreign language classroom." In Kühn, O. and Mentz, O. (eds) *Zwischen Kreativität, Konstruktion und Emotion: Der etwas andere Fremdsprachenuntericht*. Centaurus Verlag

Kocher, D. (1999) *Das Klassenzimmer als Lernwerkstatt. Medien und Kommunikation im Englischunterricht nach der Storyline-Methode*. Hamburg:

Kovac, Pachler, N. and Field, K. (2001) *Learning to teach Modern Foreign Languages in the Secondary school.* Second edition. London: Routledge Falmer