

## Storytelling for Primary School English Provision:

### Is it worth exploring?

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#### Introduction

How many of those Japanese teachers who have been involved in the recent development of primary school English provision have ever thought of using the classroom practice of storytelling or have actually conducted it? It seems to me that, in comparison with other well-known practices for primary school students, such as games and songs, storytelling has been rather unexplored and much less commonly practiced, especially in the public sector in this country. Only recently has the idea of using a picture story book and storytelling techniques shown up in books and journals presenting a collection of various instructional ideas produced by Japanese primary school teachers. Uchiyama (in Gotoh and Tomita 2001) and Naoyama (in Kageura et al. 2006) are such precious entries. Both of them use *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, an internationally famous picture story book. Matsukawa (2003), who is a leading researcher on primary school English in Japan, expresses her hope that the classroom practice of using picture story books will be explored more greatly.

The fundamental question facing teaching practitioners in primary education should be whether the idea of conducting storytelling with a picture book is worth exploring. The present study explores this question by examining some of the contextual factors in the recent development of primary school English provision in this country and reviewing some of the major issues discussed in the literature on stories and storytelling for primary school students. Throughout the paper, focus is on Japanese class teachers conducting what is termed by the education ministry “English Activities” and the applicability of storytelling to their classroom teaching.

#### 1. Primary school English provision: a new development in Japan

There has been a world-wide expansion of primary school foreign language teaching. As pointed out by Sallabank (1999), many countries have proceeded from small-scale experiments to general provision. This is also the case in Japan. The earlier experimental phase of primary foreign language in this country was for three-year exploratory studies assigned and funded by the Education Ministry (MEXT hereafter) and conducted by a total of 63 schools in the 1990’s (Kageura 1997). Then, in 2002, MEXT set up a new curriculum and this made it possible for any schools to offer “hands-on activities to expose children to foreign language” as an optional component of the newly-introduced curriculum category of “the Period for Integrated Study” (“Sogo-Gakushu” in Japanese). At that stage MEXT also published a handbook for elementary school English. A survey conducted by MEXT in the school year 2007 shows that 97.1% of a total of 21,864 respondent schools were conducting “English Activities,” the average percentage of which for each grade varies from 80.5% for 1st graders to 95.0% for 6th graders.<sup>(1)</sup>

The newest curriculum will be enacted in April this year, in 2011. The aim is three-fold: 1) to develop a better understanding of language and culture in an experiential manner; 2) to foster positive attitudes toward communication; and 3) to familiarize pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of a foreign language. All these are projected to form “the foundation of pupils’ communication abilities.”<sup>(2)</sup> The curriculum will require all the primary schools in this country to offer one class hour of “English Activities” per week to all 5th and 6th graders. In the new curriculum, “English Activities” is not given the status of a school subject but is regarded as an educational area (“ryoiki” in Japanese). This means that, unlike school subjects, teachers will not be required to use an authorized textbook or “English Notebook”, which has been recently developed for primary school teachers. As for time given to English, it is possible to offer more hours of instruction to 5th and 6th graders, and also to other graders, by utilizing another curriculum category such as the Period for Integrated Study.

### 1.1 Time, aims and syllabus

In comparison with countries where several class hours of instruction are given to English per week, not only to 5th and 6th graders but also to younger children, Japan’s primary school English could be said to be “nothing.” Those teaching practitioners who are concerned with it might need to encourage themselves by saying “Takaga ichijikan, saredo ichijikan” (“Only one class hour; yet precious one hour”). It is also necessary to consider possible difficulties that Japanese primary school teachers might encounter in offering a class hour of activities in English a week, as most of them are not English teachers.

If a Japanese primary school offers one class hour of instruction in English a week, any educational ventures should be a motivational program rather than a language acquisition program. In relation to the target language and culture, Driscoll (1999) uses the term “sensitization model” as opposed to “language acquisition model” and Johnstone (1994) employs the terms “awareness” and “encounter” programs as opposed to “subject teaching” and more intensified programs (see Fukushima 2004 for a review of their discussions). An important message extractable from their models is that one cannot expect any substantial acquisition of the target language to occur if one or less hour of instruction is offered. The vital point of program evaluation then will be whether the program enables the students to have enjoyment and a willingness to engage themselves in English-related classroom activities so that they may feel something interesting, or worth learning, lying ahead of their present exposure to English.

What has been done in Japanese primary education, however, seems to be more oriented toward students’ development of English and language-focused syllabi. In her overview of the kinds of syllabi which have been used by Japanese primary schools, Matsukawa (2003: 24) identifies these four: situational, functional, task, and topic/theme syllabi. Situational syllabi focus on conversational patterns, or role play, taking place at particular places such as a hamburger shop, or on particular occasions such as when people meet for the first time. Functional syllabi are based on communicative functions attained through speaking a language, such as requesting and giving advice. Task syllabi are oriented toward the process by which a particular task is conducted, such as making a Christmas card and holding a birthday party. Topic, or theme, syllabi draw on topics or themes about which classroom communication takes place, such as the weather, shapes and colors, and animals.

One class hour of instruction set up in the newest curriculum by MEXT is just the border. On one hand, Driscoll’s projection of sensitization model (1999) suggests that, with focuses on listening and speaking, the motivational and attitudinal aspect of foreign language learning is important, and developing a ‘feel’ for the target language is more

important than acquiring bits and pieces of the language. These notions would go hand in hand with the aims of Japan's newest curriculum for Foreign Language Activities. On the other hand, one class hour of instruction is the point where one might start thinking about children's development in the target language. Actually, MEXT's comments on the newest curriculum (2008) suggest that it is intended to be the groundwork for the development of communicative competence and thus to be connected to secondary education.<sup>(3)</sup>

Bearing the motivational nature of the kind of program set up by MEXT in mind, one might argue that there is no need to establish a linguistically oriented syllabus for primary school students. If it is inappropriate to pursue a systematic linguistic syllabus proceeding from simpler to more complex language items, or grammatical items, and to lay out a developmental path for students linguistically, like in secondary school English teaching, the significance of the syllabus types identified by Matsukawa (2003) should be put into question, especially when primary school teachers are motivated to encourage their students to learn to use the conversational patterns or communicative functions in spoken language that are enumerated in their yearly course plans ("nen'kan shido keikaku" in Japanese).

## 1.2 Classroom teaching practice

The previously mentioned survey by MEXT (2007) presents the percentages of the schools that were using five types of classroom practices. With regard to 5th graders, for example, the results of the survey show the following order from the highest to the lowest percentages: (1) 97.8% of the respondent schools indicated that they used activities which get students familiar with English, such as songs and games; 2) 96.3% of the schools used easy conversation practice, such as greeting and self-introduction; 3) 80.0% used pronunciation practice; 4) 45.4% were engaged in exposing students to English alphabet letters; and 5) 44.1% offered first-hand experience, such as meeting foreign people.

Games and songs are two of the established practices for primary school students and the above result shows that they have been well introduced in Japan. For those teachers who would like to expand their repertoire, "The Games Bank" (which is a collection of 100 games) presented by Paul (2003) is useful. The high percentage loaded on conversation practice suggests that communication might be equated mostly with the kinds of verbal exchanges between students which are directed by a patterned dialogue, such as "What color do you like?" and "I like blue." Such conversational pattern practice may be conducted not only under a situational syllabus but also with other types of syllabi. For example, the above sample dialogue might be brought in under the topic of colors or preferences. It is noteworthy that, as pointed out by Paul (2003), getting students to memorize a set dialogue is not enough and it is important whether they can use learned patterns and items "flexibly to express genuine thoughts and feelings" (p. 77). Pronunciation practice also shows a high percentage. This seems to be different from letting students naturally get a feel for the sound characteristics of English through listening. It is necessary to examine why, how and when pronunciation practice is conducted.

The 2007 survey by MEXT was also addressed to types of teaching materials. As for 5th graders, for instance, the results show this order of percentages: 1) textual materials such as picture books: 72.7% of the respondent schools; 2) audio materials such as CDs: 70.0% of the schools; 3) others: 19.7%; 4) visual materials such as videos: 19.2%; and 5) interactive audio-visual media such as computer software: 5.4%. The high loading on the first category does not necessarily indicate that picture story books and storytelling techniques were used by many schools, as there is the possibility that textbooks or materials with pictures that are intended for children were used.

## 2. Storytelling in the primary foreign language classroom: a review of the literature

There has been a proliferation of literature on primary foreign language teaching over the last two decades. Those English books intended to be an introduction to this educational area contain a section specifically addressed to stories or storytelling, and there are also some storytelling handbooks for primary school teachers (e.g., Ellis and Brewster 2002; Wright 2008). In the second edition of his 1995 handbook, Wright (2008) states: “In the years between the two editions, awareness has grown of the power of stories as an educational vehicle and of versatility in classroom use” (p. 2).

### 2.1 What is storytelling?

It is not uncommon for those English teachers engaged in secondary or higher education in Japan to communicate a story to their students in spoken English. One type of story that teachers might tell their students is a personal story of their own. A sample scene of such storytelling is from one of the junior high school classrooms that I observed. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher told her students about the heavy snowfall on the previous day and how well her son and daughter of her students’ age helped her to park her car in the garage when she got home.

Another example is the kind of story which could be told in the framework of “Show and Tell.” In order to demonstrate this common classroom activity to a group of college students in a primary school teacher’s certificate program, I brought a vase from home to the classroom and told the students some good memories about my primary school teacher who gave the vase to me, in the form of a story, including the reasons why the teacher gave it to me. After this demonstration, I felt my students began having a greater rapport with me. Still another kind of storytelling is called “Oral Introduction” or “Oral Interaction”, which is used to introduce the main points and new vocabulary items of a new text contained in the textbook.

Storytelling for primary school students is mainly meant to be the act of telling such cultural assets as folktales, fairy tales, legends and modern literary works for native-speaking children. Discussions on the method of ‘yomikikase’ (reading or telling a story to have children listen) in Japan focus on using picture books for native-speaking children. Wright (2008: 9) further includes “stories from life experience,” not only the teacher’s life story but also the children’s life stories and more public ones such as historical stories and news stories.

Telling a story and reading a story are separable acts. The former may be more powerful as a means of communication, unless the teacher shows something other than a book to which children can continue paying attention, such as picture cards (‘kamishibai’ in Japanese), slides projected on a screen, or marionettes or glove puppets played out by another teacher or other teachers. The teacher, as a teller, does not always have to follow every bit of language contained in the original story. Wright (2008) presents some examples of modified language: “through the gate” instead of “over the stile,” “quickly” instead of “in a flash” and “ate” instead of “had been eating” (p. 12).

Using stories for primary school students is more than the practice of storytelling. It could entail also having students retell the story or create a story. Pictures to be used for telling a story could be obtained from somewhere other than a usual picture book or a big picture book, for instance, from drawings by children or pre-service student teachers.

## 2.2 Views on the value of storytelling

A variety of beneficial effects are discussed by researchers and teacher educators, from the engaging nature of stories and language-related benefits to more general educational effects and methodological concerns. The following is a summary of the major points discussed by Rixon (1999), Brewster and Ellis (2002), Ellis and Brewster (2002), Matsukawa (2003), Wright (2008) and Yatsugi (2010).

### Storytelling:

- Can be engaging and motivating. Why? A simple answer might be: “Children love picture story books,” like Yatsugi (2010) says. Wright (2008) goes beyond that: “Driven by the need to understand and live with the complexity of daily experience, children hunger for stories” (p. 3). Moon’s observation (2000) goes this way: Children “enjoy stories and are keen to find out what happens, which gives them a meaningful reason for listening” (p. 109).
- Can give children a meaningful context where they can “work out the meaning conveyed by the words” through “their previous experience of stories, the teacher’s preparation for the story and the visuals and actions used in telling the story” (Moon 2000: 109).
- Will help students to develop comprehension skills (e.g., guessing meaning and predicting). If the story told by the teacher has a lot of repetition and it is easy to predict the next steps, “students will be encouraged to ‘join in’ and respond” (Rixon 1999: 132), and thus it could be a “stimulus for speaking and writing (Wright 2008: 5).
- Will enable students to get “the general ‘feel’” of language (Wright 2008: 5) and to “become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of the language” (Brewster and Ellis 2002: 187). Storytelling “can invite the children into the world of English in a natural manner” (Yatsugi 2010).
- Will allow the teacher to expose the children to “language which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their speech” (Brewster and Ellis 2002: 187). “Things like English word order will stay in children’s memory, which will naturally connect to their secondary school English learning” (Yatsugi 2010).
- Can have children feel and think about important issues by bringing “universal themes beyond the utilitarian level of basic dialogues and daily activities” (Brewster and Ellis 2002: 187) and has “educational potential” of linking in with other school subjects (Ellis and Brewster 2002: 11).
- Will give students a social experience of sharing a story and responding to it (Brewster and Ellis 2002: 187; Wright 2008: 5).
- Can be used for various classroom activities, such as drawing, book making, games, quizzes, drama, songs, projects, etc. (Brewster and Ellis 2002: 187; Matsukawa 2003: 41).
- Can be conducted with stories whose translated versions are familiar to children (Matsukawa 2003: 40; Yatsugi 2010).

Some of these benefits may not be gained through using other types of teaching practice. What draws my attention is the sharing of a story and a theme among those present in the classroom: the teacher and the students. While listening to the teacher telling a story, the students are not supposed to be so physically active as in games and not so directly oriented toward verbal exchanges with classmates as in conversation practice. However, with a story as an axis of their communication, students can experience a mode of communication which is different from games for competition and pattern practice for conversation. Sharing interest, laughter, sadness, surprise, and so on, they can further develop their communication by answering the teacher’s questions or bringing their own responses to the story.

Cameron (2001) employs a more critical stance to the use of stories in order to find the qualities of good stories for classroom language learning and to consider the importance of other text types with which children get familiar in this technological age. Another reservation is made by Paul (2003), who is concerned mainly with children in Asia. He suggests using storytelling as supplementary materials where two or more class hours are given to English.

Whatever views on picture story books and storytelling one might hold, it is the teacher him- or herself who makes a decision to use, or not to use, them in the classroom. The literature on primary school teachers' perceptions of stories and storytelling is scarce in Japan. However, there are some articles on this matter that are concerned with primary school teachers in Taiwan. Tsou et al. (2006) makes an observation on reluctant attitudes of English teachers in Taiwan toward incorporating storytelling into their instruction: "English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Taiwan report additional problems such as having little prior experience with integrating storytelling into language teaching, locating appropriate stories, and lacking the cultural and language abilities to handle storytelling in English" (p. 17). Tsou et al.'s solution was to develop a multimedia Storytelling Website where both the teacher and the students can compose a story by choosing the background, objects (characters, animals, naturals, etc. in still images and animations) and sound effects & music, recording their own voice, and typing text on the text area. They can also play model stories made by the teacher or some children.

The results of Tsou et al.'s experiment with a total of seventy 5th graders in one school showed some differences between the experimental group with whom the storytelling Website was used by the teacher to compose the chosen stories for telling and by the students to compose story recalls, and the control group with whom usual classroom storytelling and story recall writing were conducted. The experimental group, on average, did better in their sentence complexity of story recalls and post language proficiency test ( $p < .05$ ). They tended to show greater confidence in the student questionnaire when asked about their improvement on English learning, and valued the opportunity of practicing and creating stories by themselves. As for the story comprehension, the two groups did not show a statistically significant difference, and both expressed interest in having storytelling regularly as part of the class. This suggests that storytelling has motivating power whether it is conducted on the stage in the classroom or via a computer program.

Hsiu-Chih (2008) conducted interviews with 10 primary school teachers in Taiwan to examine their perceptions of the educational value of using English picture story books. She grouped the teachers' ideas about it into three groups: 1) linguistic value (e.g., students getting a better understanding of linguistic forms and communicative functions in the meaningful context of the story; and teachers learning from a story book an efficient way of speaking English for communication); 2) the value of the stories (e.g., the motivating nature of stories; shift from mechanical drill-type of learning to a more personal involvement); and 3) the value of the picture (e.g., top-down reading process made possible by a picture; stimulation of imagination and different personal interpretations). Hsiu-Chih found also that many of the teachers regarded themselves as a storyteller to "mediate the meaning of the stories and pictures to children," with their different interpretations, and to convey "the hidden meanings in the storybooks" (p. 52).

### 2.3 Selecting stories

A question that teachers might first ask themselves is whether it is appropriate to use in their primary classrooms the kinds of picture books which were written for little native-speaking children, with content too simple and language too complicated. There is good news reported by Rixon (1999). When talking about *Where's Spot?* by Eric Hill, which has

been used to have older primary school students learn prepositions and expressions of location, Rixon says: “The children tend to accept the ‘babyish’ look because of the language challenge, and the fun of predicting and calling out who they think is hiding behind the different flaps in the book ‘in the piano’, ‘under the stairs’, and so on” (p.132).

From a linguistic point of view, even a glance at some picture books would lead us non-native speaking teachers of English to recognize that very young native-speaking children are exposed to stories which are rich in language. Another example of books with lift-up flaps is *Bathtime Piggy Wiggy* written by Christian and Diana Fox (2001). The story is about a pig’s bathtime thoughts of the things he could do, and the text contains this character’s direct speech only. In this book the whole of each right-hand page, except for the first and fourth ones, is made into a flap which will be lifted up once or twice. The text elicited from the story with comments on flaps:

At bath time I like to sail my toy boat and think of all the things I could do  
in the water ...

I could be a deep-sea diver ...

(With the flap lifted up, you find:) searching for ... (with the flap all lifted up) sunken treasure!

Or maybe a water skier ...

(with the flap lifted up) flying high above the waves!

Or even a long-distance swimmer ...

swimming all the way ... (with the flap lifted up) and back again!

I could be a submarine captain ...

(with the flap lifted up twice) dodging a giant sea monster.

Or perhaps I could be a lifeboat pilot ...

(with the flap lifted up) speeding through crocodile-infested waters ...

(with the flap lifted up further) to rescue all my friends.

Better still, a champion surfer ...

(with the flap lifted up) riding the top of the biggest waves ...

(with the flap lifted up further) and whooshing down again!

Best of all I’d like to sail a boat ...

(with the flap all lifted up) around the world with all my friends.

In my view, both the content of this book and the language items contained in it might be usable for middle school and high school students in Japan. Piggy Wiggy’s ideas could stimulate the imagination so that students may work out their own ideas about what they would like to be or do, or what they could be or do. The repeated pattern of a noun plus present progressive form of a verb in Piggy Wiggy’s utterances (told by the teacher with an intervention of lifting up a flap) might suggest to students the idea of producing the whole utterance unit by unit. Also, Piggy Wiggy’s wish for companionship with his friends could be an important life-related message to students.

Useful checklists for selection of storybooks are presented by Wright (2008) and Ellis and Brewster (2002). Among those points made by Wright (2008) are these: 1) Do you like the story?; 2) Do you feel you can tell it effectively?; 3) Will the story be engaging?; 4) Can the children understand the story well enough to enjoy?; 5) Does the story offer a rich experience of values, perceptions and behaviors?; 6) Does it provide them with a rich experience of language which is relevant and acceptable?; 7) Does the story help you to attain your language-teaching aims?; 8) Does it offer a starting point for cross-curricular topic work, and that for creative work?; 9) Does it provide a starting point for language use in speaking and/or writing?; 10) Is the story helpful for you to deepen the relationship between you and the children?; and 11) Is the story an appropriate length? A caution given by Wright is important: "Cuteness might charm the adult but does not offer support for the child in trying to make sense of experience" (p. 3).

Ellis and Brewster's list (2002) is more detailed and shows their concern with five objectives of foreign language teaching: linguistic, psychological, cognitive, social, and cultural benefits for children. Their check points cover: 1) the text to be analyzed in terms of language level (vocabulary, structures and functions) and literary devices (e.g., repetition, dialogue/narration, and predictability/surprise); 2) the illustrations and layout of the story book; and 3) the story to be examined in subject matter, engaging and motivating power, values, global issues, cultural components, and cross-curricular educational potential.

As for linguistic features of stories, teachers need to liberate themselves from the traditional notion of a language syllabus going from the simpler to the more complicated. A point commonly made in the literature (e.g., Rixon 1999; Ellis and Brewster 2002) is that the simple past tense is a common feature of narratives in stories. This can happen also when the teacher gives his or her personal story. Then, the idea being presented for children's sake is that the teacher does not have to assume that simple past is more difficult than simple present and thus it should not be introduced in the early stage of children's learning. I suppose that behind this lies a belief in children's ability to grasp or find meaning as expressed by Halliwell (1992) and Cameron (2001).

When I made an observation in a primary classroom, a native-speaking teacher started talking about what she did on the previous day. However, immediately after she said, "I went to a supermarket yesterday (drawing a supermarket on the board) and bought an apple (drawing an apple beside the supermarket)," the Japanese class teacher stopped her from continuing to tell her story. The reason for that, the class teacher said after the lesson, was that her students had not learned anything about past tense forms. On the assumption that her students knew the words "supermarket" and "apple" borrowed into Japanese, the native-speaking teacher may have had the students understand her story if she had used certain gestures, comments, or questions to let them grasp the meaning of "yesterday," "went" and "bought."

For those Japanese primary school teachers who are concerned with an appropriate selection of books for their students, a useful list of 55 stories is presented by Yatsugi (2010). The list is based on Yatsugi's long-term experience as a teacher at a private primary school and kindergarten. It covers all the grades from the first to the sixth, and is partially based on the series called Oxford Reading Tree. She points out the kinds of stories to be selected for effective classroom practice of storytelling and the need for a gradual expansion of content along this guideline: 1) Children can guess the story by looking at illustrations; 2) They know the story in Japanese; 3) The text contains some learned words and expressions, or targeted language items; 4) The story is related to something that children have learned in another school subject. Her advice includes: Don't force children to repeat after the teacher, and don't translate the story into Japanese.



## 2.4 How to integrate storytelling

There are at least three possibilities of using stories and storytelling in the Japanese context, as indicated below.

- Developing a story-based course

This may never have been attempted in Japan but is worth exploring if certain public support is offered for such a new project. Ellis and Brewster (2002) present a story-based syllabus planner which was used with a class of 9-10-year-old beginners. The students received one and a half hours of two 45-minute sessions per week. In the whole school year six stories were used.

- Including the use of stories and storytelling in one's repertoire of teaching practices

This is most realistic in the public sector, as other teaching practices such as games, songs, and conversational pattern practice have been so pervasive. Storytelling may go along well with a topic/theme based approach. The topics covered in the above-mentioned syllabus planner (Ellis and Brewster 2002) are: science, animals, food/shopping, colors, clothes, dinosaurs, witches and magic, insects, festivals, friendship/helping people, sociable behavior, tolerance, equality, environment/conservation, and people/families/ occupations.

- Exploring ways of using a new technology for story-related activities

The 2007 survey by MEXT shows that primary school teachers in this country have scarcely dared to explore the use of multimedia or computers for primary English provision. Tsou et al.'s study (2006) suggests the potential for beneficial effects of a multimedia storytelling website. An advantage of using a new technology is that it may serve for those teachers who are not good at drawing and hardly have enough time to collect audio-visual aids.

When conducting storytelling, it is useful to employ the well-known three stage division for listening and reading comprehension: pre-, while-, and post-storytelling activities. Let us take a story about a little fish presented in Moon's book (2000) as an example. The little fish had a white body and wanted to get it colored like other fish. The little fish swam down to the bottom of the river to ask the king of the river, a big catfish (an eel in the original story), to color each part of his body, by repeatedly saying "Please make my (tail) (yellow)." Sample activities I have worked out on the assumption that the students know the color terms appearing in the story: 1) the teacher asks her students a couple of questions about their pet fish (e.g., "Is there anyone who keeps goldfish at home?") in an interactive manner, and talks about parts of the body of fish to introduce the new words for them, putting pictures of different parts of a fish on the board one by one to make the whole body; 2) the teacher tells the story, showing home made pictures of several scenes in the story; and 3) asks the students to choose the little fish from among the pictures of fish on the board which are colored in different ways, and to color the picture of the little fish handed to them in their favorite manners.

## 2.5 Developing the craft of storytelling

If the teacher finds it hard to tell a story in English, the first stumbling block may be the teacher's uncertain feelings about his or her proficiency in English. Wright (2008) gives teachers a way of positive thinking in saying, "One of the best ways of improving your English is to learn stories in order to internalize a ten-minute flow of English. .... So, if your English is not fluent and accurate, that is an excellent reason for telling stories to children!" (p. 15). It is also necessary to educate those college students who are receiving pre-service training in primary school education to be

competent in communicating a story to children in English. In-service teachers who are positive about incorporating stories and storytelling into their teaching practice and developing their storytelling skills may find a story told by a native speaker and recorded on a CD or presented on the Internet. They can use it as a model. Those teachers who were involved in practicing reciting a story or making a speech in their school days can base their storytelling practice on that past experience.

### 3. Is storytelling worth exploring?

Where time given to English Activities is too little, the program should only be a motivational one. Any teaching practices might serve for motivational and attitudinal purposes of the program as long as they can give students enjoyment. Where the viewpoint of foreign language acquisition can be employed, current teaching practices as surveyed by MEXT (2007) suggest some weaknesses, such as an equation between communication and verbal exchanges among students, and that between learning to communicate and learning dialogic set patterns. Storytelling could bring forth a wider vision of communication and foreign language learning.

Lowering the starting age for English learning to primary school level should entail something that is important for one's learning of English as a foreign language. It is my belief that storytelling would serve well in this respect. There are some essential elements entailed in the classroom practice of storytelling. One is the importance of the development of listening skills. This may be disregarded where teachers are mainly oriented toward children's development of speaking skills in English. The second important element is richness in language that could be brought into the classroom through storytelling. A social experience of sharing a story and responding to it can also be offered. The idea of using storytelling will require the teacher to liberate him- or herself from some pervasive notions of English teaching in terms of language syllabus and communicative competence. In comparison with some other interactional activities in the classroom, such as conversation practice, beneficial effects of storytelling may not be showing up so immediately. However, with cumulative long-term effects, it may take on an important role in children's language development in English and their growth in more general terms. Storytelling is worth exploring.

#### Notes

- (1) The results of the survey (「平成19年度小学校英語活動実施状況調査 集計結果」) is presented at:  
[http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/houdou/20/03/08031920/002.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/20/03/08031920/002.htm)
- (2) The English version of the curriculum for foreign language activities was revised on October 7 in 2010 and is presented at: [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm)
- (3) MEXT comments on the new curriculum (「学習指導要領解説」) for foreign language activities is presented at: [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/news-cs/youryou/syokaisetsu/index.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/news-cs/youryou/syokaisetsu/index.htm)

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