Stories

Narrative activities for the language classroom

Ruth Wajnryb

© Cambridge University Press 2003

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Sabon 10.5/12pt   [CE]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data applied for

ISBN: 0 521 00160 9 paperback

Contents

Contents

Introduction

Stories and 'storied lessons'

'We live our lives through texts'[1]

Stories are everywhere.

Story-telling is both universal and timeless. There's no human collective that doesn't have its stories – going back as far as the peoples of prehistory whose cave drawings are evidence of the earliest urge to communicate in story. There are the classics of literature that we might read at school; bedtime tales we might have been told as children; soap operas we might watch on TV; and action films that we might see at the cinema. Stories are also found in more formalised contexts: the accident reports we might have to write for the police or insurance company; the medical history we might give the doctor, or the explanation we might offer for being late. There are also less formal styles: the narrative jokes we tell; the anecdotes we relay about what happened 'on the way to ...'; the troubles-talk we have with a friend when something goes wrong; the gossip we might engage in about people we know; the conversations about what we've been doing that we might have with friends or colleagues after we've been away for a while; and the idle social chat involving narrative exchanges that we have to maintain and nourish our connections with others.

I read somewhere in a book about narrative that a researcher monitored a day in her life and discovered that in that period of time she encountered, directly or indirectly, more than 30 'narrative events'. I tried that myself, on a day at random. This is what happened in the first few hours. My son rang in the morning to say he wouldn't be needing an ironed shirt for work (he's a teacher) because he's taking his class out on an excursion so he can dress informally and he's going to a place that a friend told him about on the weekend where the view of the Pacific is just magnificent. Then my home-stay student mentioned she'd be late home tonight because there were going to be some visiting teachers at the kindergarten where she works and they will tell the local staff about how things are done in Hong Kong kindergartens. Then I took my

---

[1] Heilbrun (1988) *Writing a Woman's Life*, cited in Connelly and Clandinin (1990)

daughter to the doctor's at which appointment my daughter told the doctor what's been happening at school and the doctor told us what happened last time she went overseas and had to juggle the babysitting with her husband. An hour later I was at my desk and a friend rang to see how the visit to the doctor's went and I told her and then she told me an incident that happened to her the previous day at the gym. In a two-hour period, about six stories came my way in one form or another. If this two-hour period is typical, I might encounter some two dozen stories in a 12-hour period. There's no doubt in my mind that stories are everywhere and that 'human beings are story-telling organisms' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

The language we speak has stories embedded in its very fabric. Our discourse is thoroughly intertextual, sprinkled with allusion to other texts from other places and times. The temptations and dangers of the garden of Eden, Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus, Icarus' wings of wax – these references draw their meaning and strength from other, older texts with which a familiarity is assumed. Being a part of a living language, these older texts are rekindled anew in each allusion. Other stories find their way into the idiomatic structure of the language: the sword of Damocles, the Midas touch, the dog in the manger, sour grapes. Similarly, proverbs like *Beware of Greeks bearing gifts* are in fact the visible evidence of a 'submerged' story. Such usages have become so thoroughly naturalised that we are rarely aware of them.

This book exploits stories in the service of language teaching. A lesson that does this might be called a *storied lesson*. So we might think of a storied lesson as:

> a managed unit of time in the language-learning classroom during which some aspects of a story or stories are made available as a learning resource.

There's an infinite variety in the ways this can be made to happen. This variety touches on all aspects of classroom decision-making. For example, the teacher can be the one to bring the story to the students' attention. Or a story can emerge out of the collaborative efforts of students. The kind of story used is also open to choice: it can be true or based on real events; or it can be a work of fantasy; or it can be 'faction' – for instance, beginning as 'fact' and ending as 'fiction'. The lesson format may also vary: the story can start the lesson and serve as a motivator; or it can be the goal toward which the lesson is steered. In terms of classroom organisation and discourse arrangements, more possibilities open up: there can be one story that serves the entire class; or a set of stories with linked themes sub-divided among groups of students in the same class. Certainly, the ways in which the 'story

resource' can be harnessed to language-learning goals is limited only by the imagination.

Why use stories in the language classroom?

Stories serve us in the classroom in two main ways: they provide a means of teaching and learning in general; and they provide a means of teaching language, specifically.

As a means of teaching and learning in general

Stories appeal as a highly naturalistic means of teaching. As a teaching tool – loosely or metaphorically, a 'technology' – story-telling is as old as time, and certainly predates the construction of the very modern notion of classroom. We need go no further than the stories that make up the bibles of any of the world's major religions to see the pervasive power of narrative.

Stories are told for different purposes. Many have a moral or didactic goal: think of Aesop's fables or Jesus' parables. Through time, such tales have been exploited didactically for explicit lesson-making – moral, educational and intellectual – even when (perhaps especially when) the lessons don't seem like lessons. Yet others revolve around particular historical personalities, like Elizabeth I, Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale and Lawrence of Arabia, allowing teachers to infuse with excitement information that may otherwise be considered dry and uninteresting. And then there are the great historical turning points, like Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, Archimedes' bath-time discovery, Pasteur and smallpox, Nelson putting his telescope to his blind eye or Hannibal's crossing of the Alps with the elephants, which collapse great stretches of time and human endeavour into a magical historical moment, so allowing significant events and discoveries to be memorialised. Other stories seek to entrance and entertain. Think of the myths of ancient Greece and Rome and the stories that underpin the great operas.

Clearly, stories are not confined to the classroom, nor are they confined to the world of our past. We are surrounded by modern technologies through which stories are transmitted and exchanged – TV, magazines, videos, even stories that emerge from chat opportunities on the Internet. Not long ago I saw Arnold Schwarzenegger's Hollywood action epic *End of Days*, a millennium drama that reworks, re-textualises and re-popularises ancient Christian myths about conscience, redemption and the Satanic struggle for good and evil. As I emerged from the cinema, I was aware of the enduring power that this ancient story has.

The value of stories, however, goes beyond the entertainment they offer. Beyond the immediate pleasures of exposure to stories, the uplifting, exciting, moving or thought-provoking qualities of a good story contribute to an educated person's intellectual, emotional and moral development. The effect of story – one might say, its 'magic' – is to offer an infinite well of vicarious experience with the capacity to transport the reader/hearer beyond all boundaries of time, space, language, ethnicity, class or gender.

Furthermore, stories serve in the maintenance and regeneration of culture. Moses admonished the children of Israel before they entered the promised land to tell their story to the next generation, and that generation to the next. The primacy and enduring quality of story-telling are no doubt linked to its role through time in the maintenance of ethnic culture – essentially, the way in which a collective group of people maintains and bequeaths its sense of its own identity.

Stories also serve a rhetorical function. I am using *rhetoric* in Cicero's very broad sense to describe the way in which discourse is adapted to suit its end. We see this daily in newspaper articles which seek to capture the reader's attention with an opening vignette or story snap-shot, a kind of bait known in journalism as a '*Washington Post* opening'. The same strategy is often used for the same purpose by public speakers and book writers – indeed, in any context where one person (a speaker or writer) wishes to captivate and focus another's attention.

A few days ago, I picked up a book by Edward John Wade called *Teaching Without Textbooks*. It begins thus:

> When I was only a youngster I was recruited in 1963 to start up, alone, an Australian government primary school deep in the rainforests of New Guinea. After a training course in Rabaul I received my teaching certificate, along with a big patrol box stuffed with teaching notes, black paint to make a blackboard, and chalk. On the way out to my first school, three days walk from Madang, we were crossing a ravine on a rope-bridge when the carrier lost its footing – the patrol box plummeted into the river and smashed against the rocks, never to be seen again. The day I arrived at the school site, the wet season started, and the rivers flooded behind me. There were a hundred children waiting for me, and I had nothing whatever to teach them with and no way of getting anything in or out for the next four months.   Wade (1992), p. x

Within this little cosmos, created in the preface of his book, Wade immediately transports his reader into the classroom in the New Guinea rainforests and sets the lens by which we will read his book. Similarly,

many works of popular non-fiction, particularly management literature and a great deal of self-help writing, use case studies and personal vignettes for the purpose of illustrating important concepts. In literature on organisational psychology, for example, Jungian archetypes are sometimes used to typify themes and motifs in the corporate world (Kaye, 1996). It is easier for a reader to relate to a human instance of a wider notion than it is to read of that notion in purely abstract terms. In fields as disparate as psychology and public speaking, story-telling has been lauded as having potentially trance-like qualities which serve purposes as disparate as hypnotherapy (Erickson and Rossi, 1979) and attentive responses during after-dinner speeches (Robinson, 2000).

In the last decade, stories have increasingly been used in more academic contexts of learning and teaching. One manifestation of this is the use of case studies in many of the social sciences, for example, in education (Cooper, 1995; Richards, 1998). Another is as a tool in qualitative research where the social nature of narrative has gained legitimacy. Where stories once would have been dismissed as trivial and unscientific, increasingly they are being seen as legitimate ways to access human understanding. For example, in the field of educational research, we now know that teachers' narratives are a valid source of data of the ways in which they organise their thinking and understanding about their professional practice (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987). Researchers too are becoming aware that such narratives are social in their ripple effect:

> Initially a 'story' seems to be a personal matter. There is a concern for the individual narrative of a teacher and what the teacher herself, and what [others] as privileged eavesdroppers, might learn from it. In the course of engaging with stories, however, we are beginning to discover that the process is a social one. The story may be told for personal reasons but it has an impact on its audience which reverberates out in many directions at once.   Elbaz (1992), p. 423

As a means of teaching language

A second reason for the focus on story is the relationship between story and language on the one hand, and the process of second language acquisition on the other. Let's start with story and language. Leaving aside for the moment the significance of prehistory's cave drawings, few would doubt that language is the primary means by which people perform that most basic of human actions: the making of representations of their own experience.

Language is the means by which one person's experience is made

available to others – contemporary others in the here-and-now of time and space; far-flung others in the here-and-now of time but not space; or one's descendants, removed in time and probably in space. In 'experience being made available', I include the petty and evanescent, like momentary reported speech, alongside the epic and permanent, like elaborate frozen forms of ancient written myth, and all the multiple variations in between, like the vicissitudes of oral history and the subjectivities of reportage. Language is the material by which story is forged, mediating experience and enabling that same subjective experience to be accessed by others.

Now let us turn to the relationship between the language of storytelling and the process of second language acquisition. The field of second language acquisition, as far as disciplines of knowledge are concerned, is as yet in its infancy. The jury is still out on what accounts for second language learning, though we have had no shortage of 'designer methods' or theories about how languages are learned. Perhaps the best we can come up with at this point, and certainly all that is appropriate for the introduction to this book, is some sense of what conditions we consider conducive to the process of learning a language.

One framework that appeals for its lucidity and chalkface realism is Willis' model (Willis, 1996; see Fig. 1 below). This is different from the conventional instruction-based teaching models which place the teaching process at centre stage. Willis suggests that while instruction may be desirable, it is not essential. In her view, which I share, what is essential is that the learner has exposure to accessible language, has opportunity to use language, and has the motivation to learn.
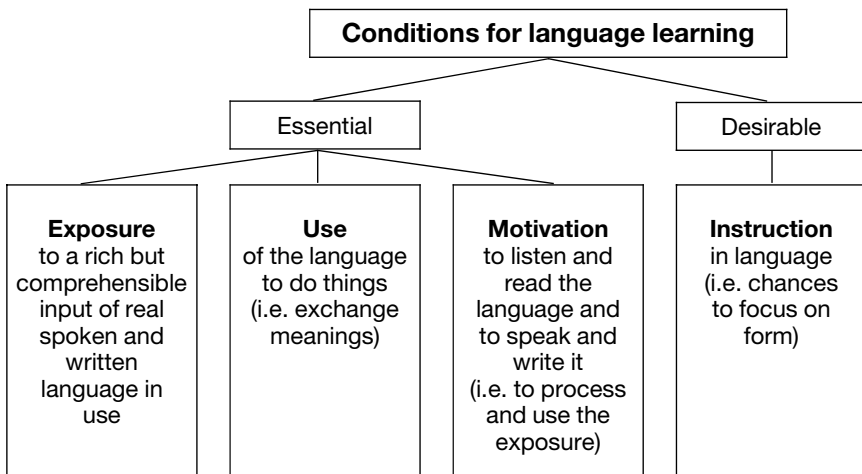

Fig. 1   Conditions for language learning (adapted from Willis, 1996, p. 11)

Using these three notions – exposure, use and motivation – it is easy to see how 'story' lends itself readily to the fulfilment of Willis' conditions for learning.

EXPOSURE

The text of the story provides the potential for 'comprehensible input', that is, language that is within the range of access of the learner. This input can be achieved in a multitude of ways: for example, by a teacher reading aloud, a student reading alone, a number of learners sharing stories with one another, groups of students working on a core text and taking it in different directions according to their own imaginations.

One example of how exposure to comprehensible input is facilitated is when the teacher uses a skeletal framework, that is, when the teacher improvises the story orally, maintaining eye contact with the students, glancing only occasionally at skeleton notes that summarise the main events of the plot. The story skeleton enables the teacher to maintain close contact with the listening audience, and this means he or she will inevitably make appropriate adjustments along the way, like glossing a word that may not be clear, or paraphrasing to give learners a second chance. Generally a telling is more redundant and circular than a straight reading of the text. Specifically, the telling accommodates the level and lexicon of the listeners, rendering it tailor-made to their needs. The telling and the being told offer a subtle opportunity to engage in the calibrating, adjusting and repair work that happen in language interactions (Morgan and Rinvolucri, 1983).

USE

Stories rarely happen without an audience – a real, intended or imagined audience. It is an easy step from here to the connected task that engages the audience in further activity. Hence in the classroom setting, a connected task that accompanies, precedes or follows the story may afford the learner further opportunity to use the language. The classroom context also offers the possibility of feedback – from the teacher or from other students – that I would argue is an important component of language use.

In his interpretation of literature as a resource for language teaching, Alan Maley (1989) offers a three-pronged approach that can easily be applied to stories. It involves *framing* (getting ready), *focusing* (engaging) and *diverging* (moving on). This does not mean, however, that exposure to a story *must* be followed up with a task. The exposure to comprehensible input can be regarded as its own task. Indeed, it is an indicator of just how active listening is that following a narrative as it is spoken may justifiably be seen as a task in its own right.

MOTIVATION

The story itself – that is, its content and meaning, including its dynamic unfolding – addresses the issue of motivation. Any teacher who has worked with stories in the classroom will know that there is something about the action-happening-as-we-speak quality of narrative that sweeps a listener along with the story line, involving and engaging the learner.

Let me illustrate this by a personal anecdote. Recently I was addressing an audience of teachers on some grand notions of language teaching when I sensed a collective glazing of the eye. I paused for slightly longer than they expected, then changed my tone, and leaning a little forward over the lectern, and catching as many eyes as I could, I said: 'Let me tell you a story about something that happened to me that illustrates what I've been talking about.' I swear there was a visible shift as people shuffled in their seats and seemed suddenly to attend in a way that my previous style of exposition had not elicited. And I imagine that you, the reader, did something comparable just now, when you read the words 'Let me illustrate this by a personal anecdote'.

It would seem then, that using story in the classroom is both a natural way to teach in general and a particularly effective way to teach language. Activities 1–42 in this book are intended to provide a rich source of ideas to help teachers to take advantage of these features.

A framework connecting experience, story and narrative

I want to outline the conceptual framework that serves as the foundation for my view of story and its use and role in language teaching. I will begin by defining the key terms *experience*, *story* and *narrative*, which are the constructs that will be explored and connected by the framework. These terms are often used loosely and interchangeably; here, however, for the sake of explaining the framework, I will use them in a very specific way.

Terminology

I want to suggest that *experience* is the raw material of *story*, which itself is the raw material of *narrative text*.

An analogy from baking may illustrate. Think of the first stage – human experience – as the various ingredients that one might assemble in the kitchen as one prepares a dish: say, flour, butter, water and salt. When we mix these together we get a basic dough. This is *story* – the

raw material that is necessary before the next stage can happen. Next we make a decision as to what we want to do with the dough. We could be making bread for a family meal, or a cake for the visitors, or biscuits for the children, or a pizza for supper. Once the decision about the outcome is made, we will add further ingredients and shape our dough – physically and metaphorically – into what we want it to become. Likewise, depending on our choice of genre, the outcome of our story is not fixed but yet to be determined, assuming its final shape when we make decisions about its social purpose.

Take, for example, the case of a traffic accident between two cars at an intersection. The *experience* is the event or incident or moment or slice of life that is encountered as it happens (i.e. two cars colliding at an intersection). The *story* is a person's reflection on the experience (in this case, the experience of the traffic accident). This might be thought of as the individual or introspective or subjective recollection of the human experience. As yet it is only a part of the inner world. It has not yet been textualised or represented or rendered socially available. So story is the raw material of the next step: narrative. It is not yet narrative because it is not yet represented – at this point the decisions about various literary constituents (e.g. character, plot, setting, imagery, conflict, tone, voice, register, etc.) have yet to be fashioned. It rests on shifting sands and may change from day to day, moment to moment, depending on one's point of view or even one's mood.

The *narrative text* is this story moved from the potential to the actual. It is one step further along – the story as narrated or as represented. The representation presupposes a social purpose, a reason for the telling. This might be the traffic accident as reported in an insurance document; or as the background to a medical history; or as an explanation for a missed appointment; or as a recount of the event to a sympathetic friend. The narrative text emerges as the product of a number of textual decisions that have to do with the communicative purpose of its representation. In a sense, you might say that the story is potential while the narrative is actual, itself an expression and a product of its social context.

Another analogy, this time from the physical world, may illustrate. I am thinking of the process of conversion of gas→liquid→solid. Think of the gas as the swirling, evanescent hard-to-pin-down experience. Now think of the next stage: liquid or water is more solid than gas but still lacks shape and parameters. This is the story, less free-floating than the experience, but not yet shaped into narrative for delivery. The final stage, the crystallised solid, is comparable to the narrative text because it has form and shape – in a sense, it has been solidified by its social purpose. Another way to think of the narrative text is the means by which the story becomes available socially. Up to this point, story has

Experience →	Story →	Narrative text
The event or happening	The event as reflected upon (individual)	The event as represented (social)
Traffic accident	*Individual's perception of traffic accident*	*Traffic accident as represented textually*

Fig. 2   Connecting experience, story and narrative text

been a subjective, even introspective concept. It moves out into the social domain once it is communicated.

So an event happens. It is reflected upon. Then it is told about in some form. In this way experience is the raw material of story, which becomes the raw material of narrative once a social purpose is determined.

Here's a personal example. Today is a day in my life that I have put aside to make a start on this book. This is the experience. I struggle to record my thoughts coherently as I sit here, in front of the computer, looking for the right words. The experience of today in my life furnishes me with a story. But at the stage of story, it is still discursive – it has the loose quality of discourse. By this I mean it is as yet unconstrained by the distinctive conventions of a particular genre of telling or narrative text. Were it to remain unarticulated, within me, as my recollection of my day, it would remain as my story. However, if I wish to share it in some way, then as raw material it will be forged and shaped and moulded into a particular form for a particular purpose. Like the dough that transforms into pizza or cake, an alchemy will create a narrative text.

As experience is to story, so story is to narrative. The story of my today may become an anecdote I tell my family tonight. Or it might become a postcard account of how I spent some of my holidays. Or at some future time, it may become a parody of the frustrations of the academic life. Or it might become the substance of a troubles-telling as I confide in a friend about my self-doubts. All these are examples of narrative in that they express my story in a clear narrative form, in a specific genre of 'telling'. The final form of the experience of my today will be the outcome of choices I will make about what I wish to do with and achieve by the telling. Thus out of the loose, discursive, process-nature of the story of my day may yet emerge a narrative which will be textual and social.

To sum up, the conceptual framework in its broad strokes seeks to interconnect human experience, story and narrative texts. It has been

important for the purpose of establishing this framework to define and use *story* in this very specific sense. Note that outside this conceptual framework, the word *story* will generally be used in its broader, more loosely understood sense.

Narrative texts as conventional choices

I should point out that the middle stage – the story as raw material before representation – is one that we are not usually consciously aware of. The types of texts we choose and their particular identifying features are not, as it were, reinvented every occasion they're used. Over time, various ways of representing human experience become ritualised into literary forms and these present themselves as naturalised conventions. When we go away on holidays and want to communicate to friends, we're much more likely to write a postcard than a religious sermon!

Over time, a nexus is forged between the experience and its representation. So for example, in some Western societies, a child's bedtime is so closely associated with a kind of story-telling that a particular narrative form, the bedtime story, has become the conventionalised vehicle for representing this experience. So it is too with holidays and postcards, church services and hymns, funerals and eulogies, police reports and recounts, elections and political campaign speeches, etc. What happens is that the means or style of telling becomes closely interconnected with the topic, and we become accustomed to doing things, and expecting things to be done, in certain words and certain ways. These representations, or genres, become an accepted part of our social identity.

It is not a big leap from the notion of conventionalised text-types to one that holds narrative to be a cultural vehicle. I see the construction and maintenance of narrative as an artefact of culture. Collectives of people become 'storied' over time. What is sometimes called *ethnic memory* may be another way of referring to the narratives that are told and re-told and become intermingled, reflexively, with collective identity, which is also being constructed through this reservoir of texts.

But perhaps more important to the second/foreign language learner than collective identity is the importance of their having access to the conventionalised narrative text-types of the target language. We cannot assume that the skill of achieving a recount, an anecdote, a postcard or a joke is easily transportable from one language to another, as the conventions of these narrative types tend to be highly language- and culture-specific.

For these reasons, one third of the resource section of the book – see 'Focus on the text as narrative' below – treats this conventionalised nature of narrative.

The social nature of narrative

When story moves from the individual, introspective domain to the social, more public domain, it emerges as a narrative text. At this point it has a social purpose (i.e. a reason for its telling) and is therefore wholly communicative. It achieves the status of a resource in language learning in at least two ways: firstly, as harnessed to the goal of language teaching (see 'Focus on language for language learning'); and secondly, as the means of forging a socially bonded community of learners (see 'Focus on the learner and the learning community').

Let's consider the social nature of the classroom via an anecdote. Not long ago I conducted a ten-week course for people who wished to become trainers of language teachers. The group met weekly for three hours at a time, over two and a half months. All were quite senior staff with very busy jobs at different language schools around the city of Sydney. Some commuted quite long distances to attend the weekly class. Taking time off to be there was not easy for any of them.

One participant had to miss the third and fourth sessions as her daughter was hospitalised with an asthma attack. In her journal when she returned, she described her memory of the group that she had left after week 2 as a collection of ten separate people, isolated learners, jostling for attention and space. On her return, we had become, albeit imperceptibly to us, a collective, a learning community, already with a shared history, shared reference points in our short-term memories, and elliptical jokes that were knitted into the fabric of our class.

Something had happened, of which she was not a part. Something had happened that caused a shift to which she became witness. A similar experience was had by another participant, who had to miss weeks 7, 8 and 9, as she was sent overseas to represent her school. When she returned, for the last meeting, she felt herself to be (almost) a stranger, an outsider looking in on a group of people who were connected to each other in ways that she was not – linked, as it were, by invisible bonds.

This 'something' that connects people who have shared an unfolding experience is sometimes more visible to those outside than to those inside the group. But even then, the connections that make a group larger than the sum of its constituents are evanescent, hard to pin down, even harder to describe. Perhaps we could say the bonds are forged by the experience of sharing experience – the sharing of common reference points in a common experience. For example, when I used to train pre-service teachers, in the days when demonstration lessons were the vogue, I used to find that the shared reference point of the experience of the demonstration lesson served then and many times later to bond the class of trainees in ways that other learning experiences didn't.

Another example. Recently, because of illness, my daughter missed quite a lot of school. On the last day of term, each class presented an act in the annual Music Day. This is a performance towards which the students work hard for most of the term. My daughter was distraught at missing the concert rehearsals, not really because of the musical value, but because of the fun of working with her class – that is, the feeling of co-operative bonding that happens as a group works collaboratively on a project. She'd experienced this in previous years and lamented missing out this time. A wise teacher at the school urged me to bring her to school on the day of the concert. 'Let her be part of the audience, even if she can't participate on stage,' he said. It was important to her member-ship of her class, that she share an element of the collective experience, so that when her friends would later recall and refer back to the concert, she could engage in the collective memory and the sense of belonging that this engenders. This interconnecting with others over time – especially being co-passengers on a shared learning curve – breaks down the barriers between people and allows students to mesh a little with each other's lives.

This is a social perspective on narrative that is closely connected to the psycho-pedagogy of classroom work. Students may evolve over time to become something other than they were and something other than the sum total of their individual selves. The stories they bring with them are interwoven with the ones they forge collectively through the experience of learning together, and together they serve to transform a disparate collection of students into a learning community.

Thus we may speak of the unfolding narrative of an ongoing learning experience. *Narrative* in this sense is not something students produce. Rather, it is a discursive concept, something dynamic that is forged through the commonality of their shared learning experience. As teachers, I believe we are wise to exploit the power of a 'storied' class for its energy and receptivity are powerful adjuncts to learning.

An example will illustrate the generative power of interweaving stories. A teacher recently had an EFL class of about 18 students, representing seven different nationalities. As he conducted his usual initial grab-bag of getting-to-know-you activities with the class, it turned out that three of the students – a youth of 18, one of 20 and a woman of 30 – were from Vladivostok. Until that moment they had not known that there was anyone else from their home city in the school, let alone in their class. Through probing and questioning, it turned out that the three students were all from the same area of Vladivostok but had not known each other 'back home', even though two of the three had actually gone to the same sports club as children. This came out very publicly during an activity ('The landmarks of your life', activity 32). As the three found out about their shared backgrounds, the rest of the class

found out too, even though none of them had ever heard of Vladivostok before. The knowledge quickly became incorporated into the class's collective reservoir. It was jokingly suggested that the three students may all be related, unbeknown to themselves – in fact the class took on this notion and started referring to the two males as 'brothers'. If they were late, various explanations were offered ('They must be down at the sports club') and the information about their coming from Vladivostok became public-domain property in the class. The Russians played along with the group joke, forming a well-bonded threesome within a larger well-bonded class.

The Vladivostok case is a good illustration of how students bring their stories to class and, once there, forge new ones, often based on the old, which become interwoven collectively. What's important in this example is not the incident of the Vladivostok students, but rather how they and the rest of the class collectively discovered the story and how this discovery was *achieved* collectively and discursively in class. This is an example of lived, shared experience; others may be a memorable lesson, an incident they all experienced at the same time, an in-class joke. The skilful teacher will use these raw materials to promote conducive conditions for language learning. In the Vladivostok case, the teacher made skilful use of the circumstance that presented itself. However, with or without a teacher's intervention, such shared experiences may become the stuff of narrative.

The two elements described here – the individual/biographical and the collective/shared experience – actually work in tandem towards the discursive construction of a 'storied' class of learners. It might help to think of each individual as the reservoir of countless micro-episodes of experience constituted of recollections of previous (long past and recent past) engagements with people and events. As these micro-units are shared in the classroom, under the auspices of a learning task or activity, they become the shared property of the community of learners.

The quilt as metaphor may help here. A quilt is made up of any number of squares stitched together to make the larger unit of the quilt. Think of the individual squares as the micro-biographical narratives that individuals bring and share. Think of the stitching that holds all the squares together and enables a coherent whole to be created as the experiences that the class shares through the time they have together. This will include tasks and projects that have been worked on, problems that have emerged and been worked on, excursions, jokes, idiosyncrasies, conflicts – collectively, the constituents of the unfolding narrative of the class's experience together.

Interestingly, the social bonds that connect a class are often invisible to the outsider and only made apparent through certain outward signs, such as laughter. I've found that laughter is a good indicator of a well-

bonded class: it is significant that the jokes are often incomprehensible to an outsider because they are forged from the collective shared experience of the group. Only an insider will 'get' them – or, as they say, you have to have been there.

Goals of the book

This book has three goals that individually and collectively have to do with exploiting elements of story and narrative in language learning. The three goals map out into the three main sections of the book, each with its own focus.

Focus on the text as narrative

The first goal might be thought of in terms of declarative knowledge of the conventions of narrative genres. This relates to the textual and literary sense of *narrative*. The aim is to have students know something of the linguistic nature of the narrative genres that interest them or that they are likely to encounter in second language situations. In other words, it aims for students to understand the conventions of various genres that employ narrative, for example, anecdote, joke, urban myth, soap opera, radio serial, newspaper account.

However, while I term this *declarative* knowledge (as distinct from *procedural* knowledge – see 'Focus on language for language learning' below), I do not mean that it is information to be transmitted in the jug-to-mug style of the old chalk-and-talk classroom. Section A of the book offers a bank of lesson activities that through various means aims to have students engage experientially with the narrative features of stories. For example, one of these, activity 3, explores the six-stage structure of narrative, focusing on the complication and resolution stages, where students exchange half-written narratives and resolve other groups' 'complications'. Activity 7 draws attention to the notion of perspective, that is, the point of view from which a narrative is told. Students are encouraged to reframe a traditional story, changing the familiar perspective to one of their choosing.

Genres are culturally determined and linguistically realised – which means a learner cannot necessarily comfortably import particular genres from their first language to the second language. (An example of this is the kind of difficulties ESL/EFL learners of Japanese or Arabic lingual backgrounds have in writing academic essays in English.) I believe that taking on literacy (both oral and written literacies) in another language requires an acculturation to the genres of that language. This is a process by which learners may become consciously

aware of the kind of socio-cultural, pragmatic and discursive knowledge held (usually subconsciously) by adult native speakers of their first language. The goal is to enable learners to engage in and interpret a diverse range of conventional language events in their target-language lives.

More specific information about the textual nature of narrative is given on pages 20–23.

Focus on language for language learning

The second goal might be thought of as procedural, in that working with stories is a means of accomplishing tasks that are different from the actual story. The focus is not on the literary features of a text but on the way in which it can be harnessed to other pedagogic goals. Stories can be harnessed to teach a multitude of language-related concerns: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, the four macro-skills, and all kinds of discussion about content. For example, a lesson on the theme of *adoption* might involve a jigsaw set-up, with students reading and telling about the account of a child who discovers in adulthood that she is adopted, the account of the birth parent who gave the child up for adoption, and the account of the adopting parent who raised the child. The outcome of the various readings and tellings might be to debate an issue relating to adoption or to write an argumentative essay for or against the idea of adoption. Thus the various input stories may serve as 'carrier material' (Allwright and Bailey, 1991) for any number of language goals.

Here, the exposure to the 'storied' lesson, either receptively (listening or reading) or productively (speaking or writing) provides the scaffolding for something else. The story phase might be thought of as instrumental, leading to or enabling a skill outside of knowledge valued for itself. Primarily we give attention to the tasks we set the students in relation to the story (e.g. read it, write it, listen to it, share it, argue about it, extract something from it, respond to it). For example, a story may be specifically constructed to provide practice in discerning different sounds and followed by tasks providing practice in these (e.g. activity 23). Or a story (or rather, stories) may be built up gradually by a whole class, working in groups, who respond to narrative triggers from the teacher (e.g. activity 26). Or students may take a particular case in a narrative case study involving a dilemma, and then argue the case from a particular perspective (activity 19). This approach to narrative is less textual than pedagogic – using story elements as the jump-off point for a host of language-learning objectives.

Focus on the learner and the learning community

The third goal might be thought of as psycho-pedagogic, designed to contribute to the building of a 'storied' class. On the premise that a well-bonded class contributes to conducive conditions for language learning, the focus here is on affective and interpersonal goals.

Exploiting the social dimension of narrative to forge bonds of interest and communality among learners is something teachers often do quite intuitively. The goal is both constant and cumulative: constant because a positive classroom dynamic is not produced by any one specific act but requires constant nourishment and exercise; and cumulative in that shared experiences, including shared stories, gradually construct a 'storied' class. Students contribute to this in the main by what they bring of their biography to the classroom and by what they collectively forge through their shared learning experiences.

The activities that constitute Section C of the book will enable teachers to capitalise on the narrative potential of their class. In this way, moments such as the Vladivostok one described earlier are less a matter of the fortuitous and more the outcome of 'pedagogic engineering'. For example, activity 36 requires students to wear to class a T-shirt that they can connect to a place and time in their lives. This then becomes the point of departure for a collection of narratives that emerge from authentic incidents. Activity 30 explores the narrative that underpins names and nicknames, and again calls on the reservoir of personal experience that is 'there for the tapping' in a classroom. Activity 33 uses a graph construction activity to enable students to plot their English learning biographies which, once exposed, then become shared in the public domain.

Organisation of the book

This book has two main parts:

- 42 activities, which offer ideas and procedures for lessons
- the Story bank, a resource of additional stories for teachers to use.

In all activities, resource material is made available to help teachers to implement the lesson ideas. At the end of many activities, a cross-reference to the Story bank indicates further material that could also be used. A list of references for further reading and resources is found at the end of the book.

Activities: Sections A–C

The activities are organised according to the three goals of the book, as outlined above. There are three sections, reflecting different focus areas:

A ACTIVITIES 1–14: LEARNING ABOUT TEXT AS NARRATIVE GENRE

 In this section you will find lesson frames that will help you build students' knowledge and appreciation of the systematic conventions of various narrative genres.

B ACTIVITIES 15–28: LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH NARRATIVE LESSONS

 In this section you will find lesson activities that exploit narratives for diverse language-learning goals.

C ACTIVITIES 29–42: BUILDING A 'STORIED' CLASS

 In this section you will find lesson activities primarily aimed at the affective domain. The activities here draw on the 'storied' lives of individuals and also seek to establish patterns of communality among the students so as to build up a 'group memory' of engaging enterprises that will be remembered long after the last lesson has ended.

Within the three sections, the activities are ordered and grouped as explained in the preamble to each section. Care has been taken to include activities for the lower proficiency levels, where story work is generally harder to accomplish because fewer assumptions about existing knowledge can be harnessed.

Presentation of activities

The activities are presented in a format which gives an easy overview and allows preparatory work to be quickly identified.

- **Aim** offers a short statement of the overall purpose of the activity.
- **Language focus** is a brief summary of what the activity seeks to address in terms of language points or skills.
- **Level** indicates the desired language ability of the learners. However, many of the activities are self-adjusting in the sense that they can be adapted up or down the ladder of learner competence. When using an activity with a class lower than the level for which it is indicated, more scaffolding support will be required.
- **Time** provides a guide only – teachers should adjust the estimated timing to accommodate the needs of their class and the constraints of their timetable.

- **Preparation** alerts teachers to what they need to do prior to the lesson.
- **Procedure** is a step-by-step guide to the way the activity might unfold in the classroom. This is a guideline only. The teacher is always in the best position to judge whether to stick by the plan or not, bearing in mind that good teaching is largely about being responsive to classroom events as they unfold.
- **Teacher's notes** are helpful hints largely furnished by experienced teachers who have trialled the material.
- **Variations** offers other ways of doing things, including suggestions for follow-up and consolidation.
- **Acknowledgements** Because teaching ideas take on a life of their own, it is not always easy to trace back the origin of an idea. Every effort, however, has been made to include these in the Acknowledgements at the end of each activity. A full listing of source material is found in References on pages 233–241.
- **Story bank** refers to alternative or additional texts to be found in the Story bank on pages 209–232.

Section A: activities 1–14
Learning about text as narrative genre

Some defining features of narrative

- A narrative is a text, a piece of connected discourse, larger than the single sentence, but varying in length from a short text of a few sentences (e.g. a joke, an anecdote) to a complex form containing many sections and sub-sections, such as we might find in a novel.
- It contains some unfolding action, involving change, movement, a process of transition. In other words, there is some shift in the 'state of play'.
- Typically, it is composed of three broad stages: an orientation, a complication and a resolution. The orientation is usually at the start, where the 'possible world' is created. The complication typically follows and may itself be sub-divided or even involve a series of complications. The resolution achieves closure and is usually located near the end.

  The above sequence is, of course, merely a classic design or template that is flouted perhaps as often as it is conformed to. In this sense, it is more in the order of a maxim than a rule, a shape for orientation rather than a design blueprint. Certainly the sequence of elements is often mixed up. Sometimes the story begins with the complication and here one is launched straight into the action. Sometimes one discovers the resolution before knowing the complication. Sometimes, too, the orientation is a gradual and guarded process that takes the entire narrative to unfold. Then there is the kind of narrative which is deliberately left unresolved: here the resolution *is* the lack of resolution. Of course, the post-modern variety of narrative is more likely than ever to blur the boundaries of orientation/complication/resolution and leave any definition of such to the audience.
- There is a readily recognisable sense of character, audience and purpose. We know (or find out) who the participants are; we know (or find out) to whom the story is addressed; and we know (or find out) why it is being narrated.