

Teaching English to Newcomers

Phase 3 – Shared stories

Ideas for working with Intermediate Learners

Teaching English to Newcomers, Phase 3 – Shared stories. Based on *Phase 3 – Vertraute Geschichten*, by Kathrin Pope, Wycliffe Switzerland and Silke Sauer, Wycliff Germany, 2016. Inspired by Greg Thomson's [Another 250 Hours: Getting Underway in Stuff-We-Both-Know Activities](#). Copyright of *English Language Lessons for Newcomers* 2021. SIL International. Licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 international.

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Greg Thomson's original materials can be downloaded from growingparticipation.com.

In Phase 1 (the first 100 hours), the learners have built up an active and passive vocabulary of about 600 to 800 words. They have learned to communicate in individual sentences in everyday situations. During Phase 2 they learned, with the help of picture stories, to express themselves more freely. At the same time, their active and passive vocabulary has at least doubled. They are no longer beginners. They now understand quite complex language without the help of pictures and gestures, as long as it is about topics they are familiar with.

Phase 3 is divided into three sections, 3A-C. At this stage, to improve participation in conversations, there is a focus on:

- Increasing the active and passive vocabulary
- Using more complex grammatical structures
- Applying correct sentence grammar

Equally important, Phase 3 helps the learners become more familiar with the host culture by deepening and expanding relationships. At this level we essentially work with stories on familiar topics. Pictures are rarely used in this phase.

Possible topics:

- Stories for children and young people
- Stories that both learner and nurturer are familiar with
- Current events that everybody is talking about
- Shared experiences: going shopping, going on a picnic or other outing, cooking and sharing cultural dishes, playing games, visiting a friend, etc.

- Practical skills such as washing dirty dishes, using a washing machine, preparing a favorite dish, changing a child's diaper / nappy, buying a bus ticket from a ticket machine, changing a tire, etc. – things that are part of the everyday life of the learners. Picture frames can be helpful to support a specific activity.
- Short films and cartoons with little or no text

How to work in Phase 3A

Working with shared stories

- Select a story or practical skill that is more or less familiar to the learners. (Possible topics see above.)
- Tell the story, or explain the practical skill step by step freely (i.e., telling, not reading).
- Record. An audio recording has the advantage that you can tell the story from beginning to end without interruption. If it is not possible to make a recording, stop whenever the learners have a question. A further advantage of the recording is that the learners can listen to the story again after the lesson. This helps the new words and expressions rise higher up the iceberg.
- Listen to the recording together and promptly explain what the learners did not understand. Note new words and phrases.
- Practice any new words and sentence structures. For each new word, make a variety of sentences.
- Homework: The learners listen to the story until they fully understand, even without looking at the word list.
- In a later session: The learners tell the story freely. They can take turns and help each other. They can also tell the story to other people who are not part of the learning group.

Example:

The following narrative about a shared experience shows how a nurturer and a learning group work together on a story. The nurturer tells the story and records it at the same time:

On Saturday afternoon we met at the neighborhood park for a picnic. It was a beautiful sunny day.

When we arrived at the park, we found a nice picnic table close to some trees. We laid a blanket under a big tree. This gave a nice shady area for the smaller children to sit. We each brought some food to share. There were many different dishes. Our lunch was delicious. After lunch, Aminah served hot sweet tea from a thermos. Omar played some games on the grass with the smaller children. The older children played on the swings on the playground. (etc.)

Next, listen to the recording together. If there is something that one of the learners hasn't quite understood, stop the recording and explain. (If no recording was made, the questions must be clarified while you are telling the story.)

New words and expressions can be clarified in this way:

Learner 1 (L1): *What is a picnic table?*

Nurturer (N): *Do you remember the table with benches under the big tree where we sat for the picnic? These are picnic tables.*

L2: *We have these in my country in the big parks.*

L3: *And a thermos?*

N: *It is a metal drink container made to keep hot drinks hot for many hours. They come in different sizes.*

L4: *What is laid? What are you doing with blanket?*

N: *You know this word. I am laying the blanket on the floor. If it was yesterday, we say "I laid the blanket on the floor". Remember, you can stand the bottle on the table or you can 'lay' the bottle on the table. Yesterday, I 'laid' the bottle on the table. We 'laid' the blanket under the tree.*

Etc.

During this conversation, you (or one of the learners) makes a list of the new words. Then go through the list again and try to form further sentences using these new words. As words are used again in different contexts, they rise higher up the learners' icebergs.

Example for "thermos":

N: *Aminah has a thermos, she brought it along full of hot sweet tea.*

L1: *I don't have a thermos, I can't take hot tea along.*

L2: *In my country I know people who use a thermos to keep drinks cold.*

L3: *You could also take soup in a thermos and it would stay hot.*

Working with cartoons with little or no text

For example: Nu Pagadi – there are multiple videos available in YouTube.

- Watch a short video together, during which you tell what is happening. Make an audio recording.
- Go through the recording (as described above), write down and practice new words.
- In a later session, watch the video again, the learners tell what is happening.

Practical skills

- Describe a process step by step with a lot of detail (see example below), while you or one of the learners carries it out. Make a recording.

- Go through the recording (as described above), write down new words.
- You carry out the process, a learner describes with his own words.

Example: Washing dishes

First, turn on both the hot and cold taps. Use less or more hot water to find the right temperature. Next, place your washing up bowl in the sink or use a sink plug. Then, fill the sink or bowl about half full of water. At the same time, add dish washing liquid to the water. The liquid will begin to foam in the water. Now take a dirty plate in one hand and put it into the soapy water. Use the other hand to hold the dish cloth or sponge to rub the plate clean. Rinse the soap off with clean water, then place the clean plate next to the sink to dry. You can also dry the clean dishes with a tea towel, etc.

Phase 3B

In Phase 3B we continue in the same way as in Phase 3A, but we talk more about our habits, customs, festivals and their backgrounds. These can also be compared with the learner's home culture.

In this phase, things that are generally known to the local people, such as the local history, also play an important part. At first, the learners are not familiar with these topics. You can still talk about such topics, make audio recordings and listen to them together.

If the learners can read, you can also start reading short texts together and talk about the content. Make sure the learners are interested in the topics, and that the language and vocabulary are not too hard for them. Suitable texts can be found, for example, in the local newspaper, in non-fiction books or even in primary school textbooks. Everything that the learners don't understand straight away can be clarified in conversation. In the following lesson the learners try to freely tell the story of the previous lesson.

Phase 3C

In Phase 3C we include in our sessions conversations about abstract topics that are familiar to the learner:

- Conversations about films or books known to both the nurturer and the learner
- Listen to/watch radio or television news together, then talk about it
- More complex versions of stories you've worked on before (when you previously had to simplify)
- Audio or video recordings of stories for children
- "Town gossip" (events or topics that everyone is talking about)
- Topics from school books on history, geography, etc.

Proceed as before: Talk about the topic, record it and go through the recording with the learning group. Create a list of new words and practice new words and expressions in different contexts to ensure they are understood and can be used again in conversation, etc.

Any topic that is of interest to both you and the learner is suitable. Each session should contain the following "ingredients":

- High doses of comprehensible input (slightly challenging)
- approx. 10 new words per hour
- spontaneous conversation practice

Summary

- Phase 3 starts with simple stories, increasing the difficulty gradually.
- Commonly known stories as well as conversations about everyday life are good sources to give learners an insight into the culture of their host community.
- Through joint activities, learners become more familiar with the culture and everyday life, and they get to know more people. At the same time, joint activities increase the number of “shared stories” you can use for conversation topics.
- Listening to recordings from previous sessions is essential. Learners should be encouraged to listen to new recordings until they can follow easily, and also periodically listen to older recordings. This is one of the keys to expanding passive and active vocabulary. Words rise higher up the iceberg every time the learner hears and understands them.