

## **Practical Pedagogical Ideas**

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### **Developing L<sub>2</sub> Oral Proficiency through Personal Anecdotes**

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#### **Introduction**

Teaching students how to tell a personal anecdote has many benefits in second language development. This account shares three lesson ideas culminating in a class presentation in which students will share an anecdote. The lessons aim to develop language content and vocal delivery of an anecdote.

Oral storytelling has been an important form of communication across time and cultures. There are many varieties of storytelling; genres include fables, epic poems, and legends. These served as ancient instructional tools: it has been widely established that the oral storytelling tradition was means of passing down customs, cultures, and history before the rise of written language. About this local context, Bidari (2019) wrote, “Even in Nepal, much before the formal education began; the elderly members often told stories to educate younger members in the family” (p. 233).

Even after the industrial revolution, storytelling continued to have a place in formal education. Marie Shedlock, a schoolteacher who became a professional storyteller in the late 19th century, promoted it as an educational tool (Shedlock, 1951). Storytelling remains ensconced in modern classrooms as well, with particular relevance to the language arts and literature. Particularly in the foreign language realm, Lucarevschi (2016) reviews several studies relative to storytelling and L2 learning, including its effect on the development of specific language skills.

The Journal of NELTA has published several articles on storytelling and L2 skill development. The following articles might be of particular interest to educators in Nepal. Neupane (2007) and Thapaliya (2012) reported on using literature and short stories to teach critical thinking in Nepal. Bidari (2019) shared a creative, hands-on pedagogical idea on using story-based teaching with young learners. Copeland (2007) and Feng-chen (2013) shared vocabulary building tasks through storytelling exercises.

The pedagogical idea presented here is a story-based classroom project, however it does not focus upon fictional tales. Teaching and telling of personal anecdotes has received less attention in the foreign language field. Instead of focusing on famous stories by established authors, this project prioritizes the real-life experiences of students. In addition to empowering students' voices, teaching anecdotes has a practical value as telling anecdotes are often required tasks of standardized tests such as the IELTS examination.

What follows below are descriptions of three lessons in which students create anecdotes and perform them in a class project. The lessons target the development of several language skills: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking fluency. This pedagogical idea was introduced as a pilot project at the NELTA-TESOL Conference in 2019.

**Proficiency level :** Intermediate and Higher

**Age Group :** High School and Higher

**Class Time :** Three 45-60 minute lessons

### **Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to transform a memorable life experience into an entertaining anecdote.
2. Students will organize the content of an anecdote and strategically use words, phrases, and grammatical forms to create a cohesive narrative structure.
3. Students will manipulate their voice (vocal prosody) in multiple ways in order to engage audience.
4. It is hoped students will value their own life experiences as one is worthy of sharing and reporting to others through anecdotes, and as a result, making better interpersonal connections.

### **Resources:**

1. Worksheets from the British Council (available: <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/exams/speaking-exams/tell-story-or-personal-anecdote>)
2. YouTube Clips
3. Audacity audio editing software (available at: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>)

### **Procedure:**

#### **PREPARATION:**

1. Review lesson plans available online from the British Council Speaking

Exams “Tell a story or personal anecdote” webpage. Locate the “Worksheets and downloads” section in the middle of the webpage. Print the following worksheets titled: planning sheet, tips, and exercise. Teachers should prepare 2-3 anecdotes of their own. Consider story content that is surprising, triumphant, heart-warming, or other noteworthy experiences from your life.

### **CLASS 1 - Script Development**

1. Introduce the concept of anecdotes by telling 1-2 from your life. After each anecdote have students discuss in pairs 2-3 questions. For example, “How did the story make you feel? What would you have done in this situation?”
2. Introduce the concept of how to tell a good anecdote from a life event. First, stress that a good anecdote begins with selecting a memorable life event. Have students complete with the following introduction prompt, “I felt most \_\_\_\_\_ in my life when...” in just one sentence three separate times. The point here is for students to recall three different memories from their lives. After they complete the three total sentences, have the students tell the rest of the story which was introduced by the introduction sentence to a partner. Change partners two times so that all three stories are told.
3. Before the students write a complete anecdote, you will teach them about content structure and language. Distribute the British Council’s “tips” worksheet and demonstrate how you used tenses, adjectives, and adverbs strategically in your anecdotes from Step 1. Provide printed scripts of your anecdotes and have students highlight targeted grammatical forms.
4. Pass out the British Council’s “exercise” worksheet. The worksheet has useful phrases to indicate narrative sequencing. Have the students complete the worksheet (confirm responses in the “Answers” worksheet).
5. Teach the students that good anecdotes should include particular information in the three parts of a story: beginning, middle, and end. Instruct them to write details in the following sections: establishment of characters, setting, and conflict (beginning), a sequence of actions (middle), and a clear conclusion (end).
6. Provide other tips for sparking interest within the audience. These include other characters, monologues of the main character’s thoughts, dialogues with other characters, and sound effects. Also, if applicable, a lesson learned or moment of realization provides a clear ending.
7. Instruct the students from the three sentences they completed in Step 2, they will chose one to develop into a complete anecdote. Encourage them to select the story they feel will be most engaging to an audience. For the remainder of the class, allow students to write their scripts for their chosen anecdote.

Students can now write the first draft of their anecdote's script using the British Council "Planning Sheet" printout. Walk around the classroom and provide feedback individually. Students must finish their scripts for homework.

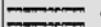
8. At the end of class, provide information about the project "The Anecdote Show" and the schedule for the forthcoming classes: after two classes an oral presentation will be due: a two-minute anecdote, without any slides or technology. The grade will be determined according to three criteria: content, language control (vocabulary and accuracy), and voice control (variety of vocal prosody). Their peers will provide additional comments and scores.

## **CLASS 2 - Vocal Development**

1. Start the class by having the students exchange their completed scripts with a partner. They will read and then provide feedback to each other. In order to maximize feedback, have students analyze the scripts with a checklist from the British Council "Tips" worksheet, or one that you have created. Return the scripts to the original student and instruct the students to revise the content of the script for homework.
2. Play two YouTube videos to demonstrate effective ways to use one's voice. First play the vocal warm up section from Julian Treasure's How to Speak So Others Will Listen Video (available: <https://youtu.be/Dtn0s1bxuPU>).
3. Next play Richard Butterworth's video Change Your Voice, Change Your Life: From Monotone to Magical (available: <https://youtu.be/Dtn0s1bxuPU>), and do the vocal exercises together. Note how manipulating vocal prosody can achieve certain psychological effects on a listener. The vocal prosodic effects include volume, pitch, inflection, and speed. For instance, loud volume elicits alarm or attention, and a rising inflection indicates a question or doubt.
4. Deliver sentences with different prosodic qualities as in Figure 1. Have the students repeat after you. Explain the original notation system developed by the researcher in Figure 1.
5. Have students apply vocal notation and practice the sentences in pairs as in the Appendix.
6. For the remainder of the class time, allow the students to revise their scripts. They can edit it based on the feedback from Step 1. Next be sure to have the students apply the vocal notation system to their own scripts.
7. Assign homework to the students to finish their script and memorize their anecdote for the next class.

**Figure 1**

**Vocal Notation and Example Sentences**

Vocal Patterns	Example Sentences
<p><b>Volume - level of sound intensity</b></p> <p> • loud - excitement, attention</p> <p> • soft - closeness, secret</p>	<p>1. <i>I just won the lottery!</i></p> <p>2. <i>I'll give you a special price.</i></p>
<p><b>Pitch - overall tone</b></p> <p> • high - stress, anger</p> <p> • low - sadness, serious</p>	<p>3. <i>How could you forget my birthday</i></p> <p>4. <i>This is the saddest day of my life.</i></p>
<p><b>Inflection - ending tone movement</b></p> <p> • upward - question, disbelief</p> <p> • downward - command, power</p>	<p>5. <i>Would you like something to drink?</i></p> <p>6. <i>Give me your money.</i></p>
<p><b>Speed - rate of words</b></p> <p> • fast - high tension</p> <p> • slow - emphasis, clarity</p> <p> • pause - focus/emphasis</p>	<p>7. <i>Time is running out!</i></p> <p>8. <i>Don't ever do that to me again.</i></p> <p>9. <i>Study your notes because there will be a....quiz.</i></p>

**Appendix**

Add vocal notations to the following sentences and practice saying them aloud.

1. Stop! Red light, red light!
2. Be quiet while the baby is sleeping.
3. Would you like some tea?
4. Give me some money.
5. Surprise! Happy birthday!
6. My pet dog died today.
7. The train is coming!
8. Don't forget to study.
9. Tomorrow there will be a....quiz.

### **CLASS 3 - Class Presentation**

1. In this final class the students will present their anecdotes. Remind students that they are not permitted to read their scripts while presenting. It is not necessary to remember their scripts word-for-word. Encourage them to improvise if necessary.
2. Prepare an entertainment show atmosphere in the classroom. Set-up a microphone and recording equipment. If such equipment is not available, use a smartphone or other device to record the audio stories. The students could use a big black marker to simulate a microphone.
3. Become a host of the “The Anecdote Show” and embrace the role of master of ceremonies.
4. Invite students “on stage” to deliver their anecdotes. After finishing, have the audience input scores and feedback on paper or digitally using survey software such as Google Forms.
5. After the class, edit all the audio files using software such as Audacity (free) or Apple’s Garageband. Distribute the audio file, grades and comments to all students.

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