



# INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Edited by

**Flora Debora Floris & Willy A. Renandya**

**Series Editors**  
**Willy A Renandya**  
**Nur Hayati**

TEFLIN Teacher Development Series

TEFLIN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Series Editors: Willy A Renandya & Nur Hayati

TEFLIN Teacher Development Series contains short practical resource booklets for English language teachers in Asia published by TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) through its Publication Division. Titles in the series (2020) include:

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# **INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

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Teacher training aims to equip teachers with basic knowledge and skills. But to achieve depth, maturity and teacher wisdom, we need the additional catalyst of lived experience. This book offers teachers just that – a rich resource of other teachers' stories to activate reflection on their own teaching values and practices. This will be a must for teacher development groups and for individual teachers to reflect on too.

(Prof. Alan Maley – The C Group, UK)

Through meticulous editing, this volume *Inspirational Stories from English Language Classrooms* offers a fascinating collection of 40 stories and classroom activities written by English teachers from 20 countries. As part of TEFLIN series, this book has been especially prepared for those who wish to use stories as motivating and engaging teaching stimuli for a wide range of institutional contexts. This book will be particularly useful for English teachers, trainees, and curriculum or materials developers. The professional expertise of the editors has enriched the book content, ensured by the association, TEFLIN.

(Prof. Utami Widiati, M.A., Ph.D – State University of Malang, Indonesia)

# FOREWORD FROM THE PUBLISHER

**I**t is a great pleasure for TEFLIN to publish this Teacher Development Series, a series which provides useful and affordable resources for English language teachers and teacher educators in Asia. The booklets in the series cover various topics pertaining to ELT and are written by experts in the field. Teachers and teacher educators will enjoy reading the series as the booklets are written in a friendly and accessible style.

Throughout more than sixty years of TEFLIN, we have shown our full commitment towards teacher training and education and teacher professional development in the field of ELT by means of various programs. We have organized conferences and academic forums for English language teachers both nationally and internationally, and collaborated with different organizations to provide support for teachers in developing their professionalism, such as, by giving scholarships to attend conferences and conducting teacher training.

Through the TEFLIN Publication Division, we have published volumes of the TEFLIN Journal, a peer-reviewed journal indexed in Scopus and fully accredited with an “A” rating by the Indonesian Ministry of Research and Higher Education. The journal contains both research and concept papers in the field of ELT. This TEFLIN Teacher Development Series is another project of the division and is yet another form of our commitment to giving continued support to the development of English language teaching in Indonesia and in the wider region. This year we are aiming to launch five books of the series, and are committed to publishing more titles in the following years to support teachers’ sustainable professional development.

We are indebted to Dr. Willy A Renandya for sharing with us his brilliant ideas and for giving his utmost effort and lending his expertise to this project. Without his capacity and networking, this project would not be possible. We also

gratefully thank all the experts who have contributed to the series. Their contribution is invaluable.

We hope this series will serve its purpose, to empower English teachers and facilitate their professional development through quality and accessible resources.

Joko Nurkamto

Yazid Basthomi

President of TEFLIN

Coordinator of TEFLIN Publication Division

# SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

**T**he TEFLIN Teacher Development Series is a series of short practical resource booklets for English language teachers in Asia as part of a collaborative project with the Publication Division of TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia). The booklets (or modules) are intended to be used by teachers (both pre-service and in-service) and teacher educators as a learning resource and as the basis for organizing workshops, in-service courses and various other purposes of teaching and learning and teacher professional development.

The booklets in the Series are written in an accessible and teacher-friendly style and cover both principles and techniques and include different topics relevant to ELT and teacher professional development. Each booklet contains practical ways for teachers to apply new ideas in their own teaching as well as reflective tasks that provide opportunities for the users to reflect on their own classroom practices.

For the second batch of the series, we have had a great honor and pleasure to work with experts in various areas of ELT. One of them is Flora Debora Floris, a productive young scholar in the field, who generously shares her knowledge and expertise in editing and also contributing her own story to this great collection of inspirational stories from English language classrooms.

We extend our utmost gratitude to Flora Debora Floris as well as other experts for helping make this project happen. We are committed to publishing more quality booklets in the coming years in order to meet the needs of English teachers and teacher educators in Asia. We hope to collaborate with many more experts in various areas of ELT and bring out booklets that are affordable and beneficial for the development of ELT and teacher professionalism particularly in the Asian region.

Willy A Renandya  
Nur Hayati

# NOTES FROM THE BOOK EDITORS

Flora Debora Floris & Willy Ardian Renandya

*Inspirational Stories from English Language Classrooms* is a collection of inspirational stories contributed by language teachers working in a wide range of contexts in different parts of the world. The book is part of TEFLIN Teacher Development Series, a collaborative project with the Publication Division of TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia).

This book is for English teachers, trainees, scholars, administrators, as well as policy makers who are interested in motivating and empowering their students through short-stories. This book also serves as a resource book for pre-service teachers who are doing their micro-teaching/practicum or pursuing their higher degree education.

The book contains classroom stories and suggested teaching/learning activities that can be used in language classrooms, teacher training and teacher professional development programs for pedagogical purposes. The stories brought by 44 contributors from 20 different countries in Asia and beyond are based on their authentic teaching experiences; and the suggested classroom activities presented in this book can be used as a model on how these stories might be used to enhance language learning and teacher learning.

This book originated from a simple idea, i.e., we love telling stories. We become story tellers and story listeners since young. Narrative conventions such as folk tales, novels, films, the story of one's life, or family stories around the dinner table have always enchanted and fascinated children as well as adults. Throughout the history of mankind, storytelling has been one of our most innate and fundamental communication forms.

Geoffrey Berwind, a professional storytelling consultant believes that "stories powerfully connect us to our listeners" (in Duncan, 2014, par. 6). Stories build relationships and are very powerful "for reducing the distance among teachers, self, and peers" (Ling-Chen, 1992, p. 970). Furthermore, sharing one's real-life stories enables our interlocutors to "feel that they get to know us as authentic people" (Berwind in Duncan, 2014, par. 6). Stories bring out genuine human connection which is a fundamental element in any human interaction.



For the past decades, studies have shown the benefits of the use of stories as a powerful pedagogical instrument from pre-school through to university level classrooms. Stories help language learners develop the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing and activate their thinking skill (McRae, 1991). “Stories allow instructors to teach the four language skills to all levels of language proficiency and can enhance ELT courses for learners if selected and exploited appropriately” (Murdoch, 2002, p. 9).

Wajnryb (2003) argues that the content and meaning of stories have impact in engaging learners in their learning process and developing their target language skills. Similarly, Wright (in Floris, 2016, p. 112) states “above all stories offer the language learner an opportunity of experiencing language rather than studying it”. In addition, other positive values which are embedded in stories “can contribute a great deal to the socio-cultural, emotional, cognitive and personal growth of EFL learners” (Pathan, 2013, p. 21).

Our real teaching experiences are stories that may appeal to many students and teachers as what we have experienced might be relevant and familiar to the listeners or readers. Our stories therefore have the potential to be used as an instrument to develop students’ language proficiency and also to help us become more reflective practitioners.

This book is divided into 5 sections and 40 chapters. As you read the stories in this book, consider how you might adopt—or adapt—the experience and the insight that these texts convey for both you and your students. We hope that this book will inspire you to develop and use your own story as a catalyst or a springboard for teaching language skills.

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We also wish to acknowledge the valuable support provided by the Publication Division of TEFLIN (The Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) regarding the improvement of the quality and the publication of chapters. We really appreciate it.

Our thanks and appreciations also go to our colleagues who have willingly helped us out in developing the project such as sharing our Call for Chapters or submitting their proposals. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all of them.

Finally, our acknowledgement would be incomplete without thanking our families who have provided their unwavering love and encouragement at all times. Their support was worth more than we can express on paper.

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*Becoming a Professional  
English Teacher*

# CHAPTER ONE

## YOU ARE THE PROFESSIONAL

Péter Medgyes

Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Hungary

My career as a teacher of English began in the late 1960s at a secondary school in Budapest. Since I found the one and only compulsory course book terribly boring, I supplemented it with Geoffrey Broughton's *Success with English*, a much more inspiring and entertaining series. With time, I sent the compulsory book to the top shelf to gather dust, and Broughton became our staple food.

One day an elderly colleague warned me that my unlawful practice had come to the knowledge of ministry officials and, as a consequence, I might have to face disciplinary measures. After some hesitation, I decided to go to the school principal and make a clean breast of my disobedience. After listening to my report, he asked, "Are you sure that that British book is better than the compulsory one?"

"Much better," I replied.

"Well, you're the professional, Péter. It's *your* responsibility to decide what works best for your students – and not mine. So feel free to use the book of your choice."

"But...but what about the ministry?" I stammered.

"That's *my* responsibility. I'll deal with it, if necessary."

Whether it was necessary or not, I have never found out. However, emboldened by my principal's support I continued to teach from Broughton and other excellent books for many more years. And most of my students graduated from secondary school with flying colors in English.

## Objectives:

1. To consider the limits of professional freedom.
2. To draw attention to the close relationship between responsibility, professionalism and decision-making.
3. To reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of homegrown versus imported course materials.

## Procedure:

1. In your country, are teachers obliged to use compulsory course books? If they are, what happens to the teacher who decides to get round this law?
2. What do you think of my 'rebellious behavior'? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why? Argue for and against in small groups.
3. Suppose you were my school principal, how would you respond to my report?

"I would:

- a. downright forbid you to use any book other than the compulsory one in the future.
- b. insist that you use the compulsory book as the main course material, but permit you to supplement it from 'illicit' sources.
- c. warn you that you should face the consequences if you were caught adopting this illegal practice.
- d. encourage you to break this 'stupid' law.
- e. do as your principal did.

Having considered the alternatives, choose the one with which you agree most and the one that you would certainly reject. Perhaps you have some other option? Discuss your choice in small groups and then report back to the whole group.

4. The compulsory book I referred to had been written by Hungarian authors whereas my preferred book by a British author. In your experience, are imported books generally better than homegrown ones? Jot down the pros and cons of both options.

There will be two teams facing each other: the members in Team A are in favor of imported books, whereas Team B rather supports homegrown materials. Join the team whose opinion you find closer to yours. Members can voice their views at any point in the course of the debate.



5. My school principal used three words: *professional(ism)*, *responsibility* and *decision-making*. How would you define these words in a teaching context? In what way do you think they are linked? Discuss with a partner and then report back to the whole group.

## Reflection:

With hindsight, I realize that my principal let me use the book I thought was better, because he trusted my professional judgment. His advice and support strengthened my self-confidence and filled me with an overwhelming sense of freedom. However, it also made me aware that freedom comes with a price: once you are granted full rein, the burden of responsibility can no longer be shared – it is on your shoulders alone.

I often wonder how I would have responded if my school principal had been less permissive and less trustful. The more I think about it the more I am convinced that I would have left the classroom a long time ago and chosen a profession offering me more breathing space.

As a teacher and teacher trainer for many years, I have endeavored to pass on the message I learnt as a young teacher: only free-spirited and responsible teachers are capable of turning young people into free-spirited and responsible citizens. This is what I mean by *empowerment*.



# CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

## CRITICAL TEACHING REFLECTION ON THE “N-WORD”

Richard W. Hallett  
Northeastern Illinois University, USA

Four years after Lithuania gained its independence from the USSR, I taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a secondary school in Kaunas. Due to budget constraints, I was given a photocopy of an old Soviet-era English language textbook to use in all of my sections of tenth grade English grammar classes, *Angly Kalbos Vadovėlis [English Language Tutorial]*, and asked to work through the text, keeping pace with the other two sophomore-level English teachers. Dutifully, I worked my way through the text while smirking at all of the Soviet propaganda presented in the textbook.

When I reached Lesson Seven, which contained an abridgement of Dorothy Parker’s (1927) “Arrangement in Black and White,” I was stunned to see the word *nigger* in the text without an accompanying gloss. However, the word “Virginia” was glossed at the end of the story: “a state in the U.S.A. The percentage of the Negro population there is 25%. The land aristocracy is a violent supporter of race discrimination.” I deviated from the book for a day, giving my students a brief history of the “n-word,” stressing how deeply offensive it is to many native speakers of American English. I ended my lecture by saying that I was not going to use the word and did not want to hear it.

After one lesson, a very bright girl asked me, “Are there any Communists in America?” When I responded in the affirmative, she continued, “Are there any Black Communists?” When I said probably, she quickly asked, “Are most Black people Communists?” I then asked her why she was asking me these questions. She responded, “In Soviet times, we were told that all Black people wanted to be Communists because they knew that was the only way they would be treated equally.”

## Objectives:

1. To get students (teacher trainees) to examine their teaching materials in a critical manner.
2. To reflect on their own pre-conceived ideas about the hegemonic positioning of the English language.

## Procedure:

1. Ask the students (teacher trainees) to read the above story and respond to the following questions:
  - a. What was the most interesting thing you learned from this text?
  - b. Was there anything you just read that surprised you?
  - c. What do you think is the purpose/aim of this text?
2. Ask the students (teacher trainees) to refer to required reading texts, especially those from state-mandated curricula or textbooks, that they used in their class and try to answer the following questions by or for themselves:
  - a. Why has this passage been included in the textbook?
  - b. What issue is raised in this passage?
  - c. How is the issue discussed/addressed, e.g. through an argumentative essay, personal anecdote, a reproduction of a newspaper article, a well-known piece of fiction, etc.?
  - d. What assumptions (both explicit and implicit) does the author make?
  - e. What are the main results, findings, or conclusions?
  - f. How universal is the interpretation of the text? Could students from other cultures have different “take-away” points from the texts? If so, are these interpretations based on different socio-cultural-historical impressions or lessons?
3. Ask the students (teacher trainees) to refer to their classroom experience in answering the following questions:
  - a. Did your students have the expected reactions after reading the assigned materials? If not, why not?
  - b. Did the students appear to grasp the issue(s) addressed or brought up by the text? What evidence is there of this understanding?
  - c. How could the text be addressed differently the next time it is taught? For example, should it be presented along with a companion piece that offers a different perspective?
  - d. Should the text be taught again? Why/why not?

## Reflection:

The above story, which I experienced about twenty-five years ago, has not only remained with me throughout my teaching career – from teaching high school EFL in Kaunas to teaching graduate linguistics classes in Chicago – but has also influenced the type of research I have chosen to engage in. Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 67) notes, “Part of knowing about the world is knowing about the power dynamics and inequalities that revolve around access to and use of other languages/dialects in different contexts for different purposes.” That specific encounter with that particularly bright student led me to rethink what I thought I knew about the dominant roles of the United States and the English language around the world. That reorientation led me to the discovery of the concepts of hegemony and critical sociolinguistics. My forays into those areas of study have most recently led me to discover the area of critical teaching reflection.

For Brookfield (2017), critical reflection is “the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions.” Moreover, it is a way of uncovering hegemony (p. 3). Critical teaching reflection causes teachers to update their teaching practices and beliefs continually based on their experiences and their students’ experiences. The goal of this inspirational story is to show how a slight deviation from an assigned reading to address a socially-relevant issue can activate not only a change in one’s pedagogy but also a change in one’s research and, perhaps, worldview.

## References:

- Brookfield, S.D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
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# CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

## POSITIONING STUDENTS AS LANGUAGE EXPERTS THROUGH MULTILINGUAL STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES

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I first met 11-year old Vishva when I was doing my doctoral research in Malaysia.

Vishva had been abandoned as a child, so he lived with his grandmother. Part of his scalp had been burned off when a pot of boiling water tipped over on him as a child, so he looked different from the other children his age, but he always greeted me with the biggest, brightest smile. Vishva had come back to school after missing a few years of schooling because his grandmother had not been able to afford his school fees.

Because of all the schooling he had missed, Vishva could not read or write in English well and he was failing his exams. During his English lessons, Vishva was always quiet and did not participate in any of the activities. However, I saw from the look of his face that he really wanted to join in, but did not feel confident enough in himself.

I asked Vishva if he could teach me Tamil, and that in exchange I would help him with his English. Since Tamil was his first language and he spoke it well, his face lit up and he nodded eagerly.

Over the next few months, Vishva and I worked together on multilingual storytelling activities such as reading bilingual Tamil-English storybooks, and creating dual-language storybooks. In all our activities, I reminded Vishva that he was the language expert and I was there to learn from him. This helped him to take ownership over his learning and to improve his English.

One day, a new boy joined the class. I watched Vishva, my heart full of pride and joy, as he walked up to the boy confidently and said “Hi, I’m Vishva. Would you like me to help you with your English?”

## Objectives:

1. To develop multilingual students' reading, writing and oral communication skills.
2. To develop students' collaboration skills.
3. To encourage a love for reading among students and develop their creative thinking.

## Procedure:

1. Prior to the class:

Ask the students to bring their favorite storybooks from home. The storybooks can be in English or in other languages the students can read.
2. Read the above story and answer the following questions:
  - a. What is the main idea/gist of the story?
  - b. What was the turning point of the story?
  - c. What message did the author want you to get?
  - d. What lessons did you learn that you can use in your own teaching or learning?
  - e. What would you like to ask the author or one of the characters?
3. Ask each student to choose a storybook that their friends brought to the class.
4. Ask the students to read the storybook. Students can work in pairs or small groups to help each other while reading.
5. After students read the book, have them think about and discuss the characters, setting, plot, conflict, story events, and other aspects of the story. You can use these questions to prompt them:
  - a. Who are the main characters in the story? Who were your most and least favourite characters and why?
  - b. Where and when does the story take place?
  - c. What happened in the story? Why did those things happen?
  - d. What were your most and least favourite parts of the story and why?
  - e. What moral lessons did you learn from the story?
  - f. If you could change the character, setting, or any of the events in story, what changes would you make?
  - g. How would those changes affect the rest of the story?

6. After this discussion, students can work in pairs or small groups to rewrite this story as a multilingual story using English and their first language. To create their multilingual story, students first discuss what changes they would like to make to the plot of the story. This can be based on the discussion in steps 5(f) and (g). Encourage students to also personalize and localize the story, for example by changing the names and physical characteristics of the characters, the places in the story, and the dialogues between characters.
7. Once students have discussed and mapped out the plot of their story, they start writing their story in English and other language(s) spoken by the group members. If there are computers or tablets in your class, students can work on writing and illustrating their stories using applications such as *ScribJab*, *MyStoryBook* and *Pixton*. If not, students can create paper-based books using materials such as construction paper, colored pencils, crayons, markers, and images from colouring books, newspapers and magazines.
8. After creating their story, students practise reading it aloud using oral storytelling techniques such as varying their volume and intonation. They then work together to record a voice-over as they narrate the story.
9. Encourage students to share their multilingual stories by publishing their books on *ScribJab* or other educational blogs and websites, or sharing their paper-based books in the classroom reading corner and school library.

## Reflection:

Studies on English language learning have shown that multilingual students benefit from using their first language or home language in the classroom because they are able to transfer the knowledge, skills and concepts from one language to another. Furthermore, knowing that their home language is welcome in the classroom “provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves...experiment and take risks with English” (Schweers, 1999, p. 7). Thus, by carving out an important place for home languages in the classroom, teachers can build bridges between what students experience at home and in school and “facilitate the flow of knowledge, ideas, and feelings between home and school and across languages” (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 41).

Although the research on language learning has suggested the cognitive, sociocultural, communicative, and affective benefits of multilingualism in the classroom, English language teachers in many contexts still implement English-only instruction in their classrooms. This monolingual approach ignores the rich repertoire of language skills and knowledge that students bring to the classroom. Furthermore, it limits the opportunities for students with a shared

first language to support their peers and scaffold each other's learning during collaborative activities.

In my experience as an English teacher in Malaysia and Canada, I have observed that when I planned lessons that incorporated students' home languages, such as the multilingual story-writing activity, students like Vishva began to feel that they were the language experts in the class, and this built their confidence, and increased their engagement in learning. The interactions between my students were also livelier, as they began to collaborate with each other and help each other learn. Plan lessons that show your students that *all* their languages and cultures are welcome and valued in the classroom.

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