

THE BENEFITS OF STORYTELLING AND STORY ACTING IN AN INCLUSIVE/MULTILINGUAL EARLY YEARS CLASSROOM

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RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the impact of storytelling and story acting in a Reggio-inspired classroom on English language development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Vivian Gussin Paley(1990) believed, “Children are born knowing how to put every thought and feeling into story form. And so to the children, newly arrived in school, drift and worry until someone shares a fantasy and there are roles to play. Then there comes a sense of place and person, and the words flow with purpose and pleasure.” When Paley began storytelling/story acting she was seeking to offer routes into early education that appealed to children from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, and with different learning needs.
- Hepner’s (2016) research findings of their study indicated that storytelling and story acting would be a useful addition to early childhood educator’s repertoire of practices which have shown to produce growth in oral language skills and further the development of emergent literacy in young children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Nicolopoulou,Igaz,Shiro and Hsin(2022) conducted a study researching the development of evaluative language among 3,4 and 5 year olds telling fictional stories to and for their peers in a preschool context. They define evaluative language as language referring to the speaker's opinions, attitudes and expectations toward the story's characters, actions and events.
- Nicolopoulou,Igaz,Shiro and Hsin(2022) study found remarkable growth in evaluative language through storytelling and story acting, and it was believed that it is because in this context children are not just storytellers but also story listeners. They are exposed to their peers' linguistic input and interpretive pressures operating in tracking orally presented stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Nguyen and Phillips(2025) believed that storytelling enriches expressive language in speech and written composition because of its authentic and refined lexis and dramatic features. They also stated that children can creatively use language based on their existing knowledge and storytelling can foster children's creativity by cultivating children's imagination, and in turn nurture children's linguistic competence.
- Nguyen and Phillips(2025) identified four key elements of storytelling as pedagogy
 - storytelling as a responsive strategy to engage children's cognition, emotion and imagination.
 - multimodality, recognizing the constant interplay between linguistic, gestural, visual, tactile, auditory, and textual modalities.
 - storytelling has a great propensity to activate mutually inspiring engagement between children and teacher.
 - storytelling as a linguistic model which enables children's agentic learning, implying the children's self-assertion in language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW REFLECTIONS

- I found my reading of Vivian Paley's book to be the most beneficial in my research. It not only helps to teach how to deliver this method, but is also an example how this method can be used with all children. In "The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter: The uses of storytelling in the classroom" Paley states "There are labels that might be attached to Jason, but we'll neither define or categorize him. None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events." This quote reminds me that all of our students, ages 4 and 5, no matter where they are from, the language/s they speak at home, or their social and cognitive skill levels, can benefit from a language rich classroom. Storytelling and story acting helps add to our practices in a very child directed way.
- I also connected to Nguyen and Phillips(2025)in their study of storytelling and story acting as a pedagogy for teaching English language learners. Their identification of the four key elements of storytelling, resonated with my practice within my classroom.
- Although the study conducted by Nicolopoulou,Igaz,Shiro and Hsin(2022) on the development of evaluative language did not directly help me in my study, it did help me see the importance of choosing one piece of my study and focusing on that, instead of the whole of storytelling and story acting.

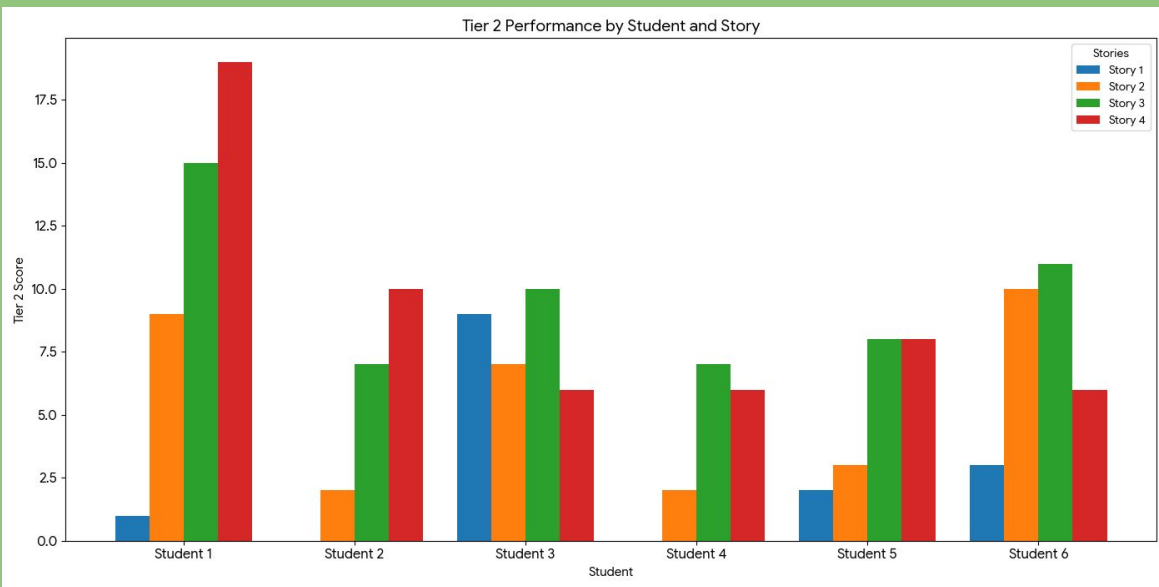
METHODOLOGY

- Weekly practice of dictating a child's oral story and reading and acting the story with the class in the same day.
- This study used qualitative data of 6 children from the classroom. Each child dictated four different stories within a span of 6 months. There were three boys and three girls. One student is a native English speaker, one student speaks English and Korean at home and four are English as Second Language learners, speaking either Thai or Chinese at home.
- The samples for each child were examined, in sequential order, to look for growth in vocabulary, syntax, and sentence structure.

METHODOLOGY

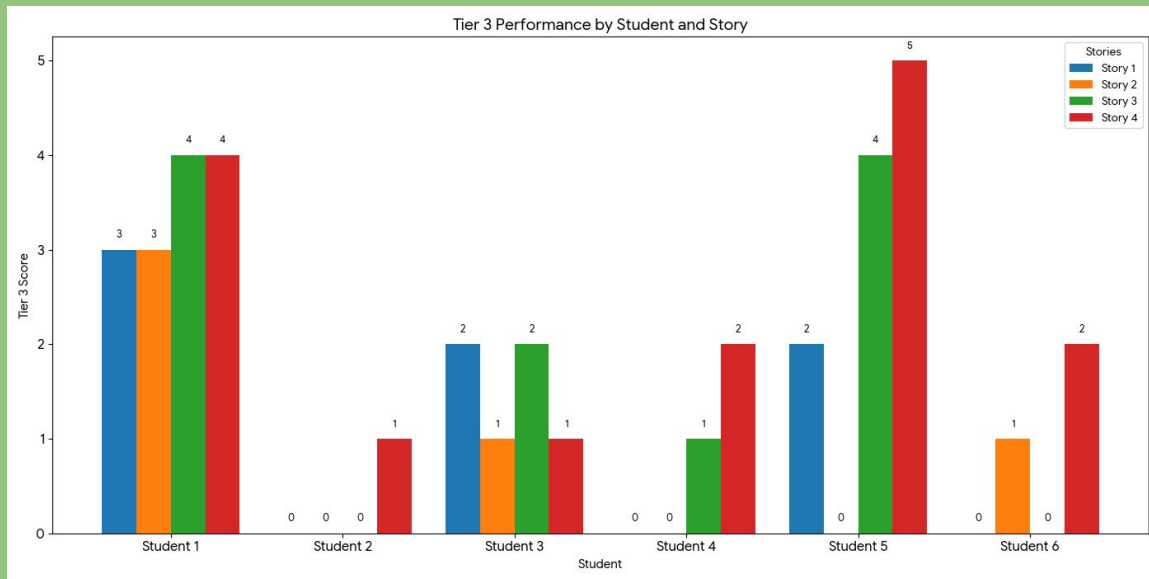
- Families were notified that their children's stories may be used for this study, and were given the option to choose to have their child's work not be part of the study.
- Each story was analyzed for word count, number of words in a sentence, syntax and vocabulary.
- The vocabulary was categorized in tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 in order to analyze possible growth in tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary use. AI was used to do this sorting and counting.

FINDINGS



- As seen in this graph, most students showed considerable growth in the use of Tier 2 vocabulary words between their first and fourth stories.
- Oddly enough, student 3, who shows a regression in their Tier 2 words is the one Native English speaker in this sampling.

FINDINGS



- As seen in this graph, most students showed considerable growth in the use of Tier 3 vocabulary words between their first and fourth stories.
- Oddly enough, student 3, who shows a regression in their Tier 3 words is the one Native English speaker in this sampling.
- Upon a closer look into the exact Tier 3 words being used by students, it was found that student 1's Tier 3 words are mostly names of people.

Student 1 - This student made considerable growth in the use of sentences containing 5 or more words, going from 3 in their first story to 19 in their fourth story. They also began to use “because” in their third and fourth story, displaying their understanding of causality.

Handwritten 1
Story 4

Mr. Brian Trouble

1965-66

A little Mr. Brian comes flying
up to the top of the lion cage
fly and eat the fly. A lion
eats Mr. Brian. A big Mr. Brian
come and eat the fly. A tiny lion
come and eat the big Mr. Brian.
The lion eat and open the fly
mouth and the lion go in and
swallow little Mr. Brian.
Little Mr. Brian yell. Brian eat
little Mr. Brian because he's hungry.
Big shiny rock come and hit
Big Mr. Brian. Big Mr. Brian
get shiny rock and hit
little Mr. Brian. Little Mr. Brian
get angry and hit the tongue
of Big Mr. Brian. Big Mr. Brian
tell down. An alien comes. The alien
kicks the big Mr. Brian because
he's angry. The alien kick
little Mr. Brian. Little Mr. Brian
talk down to earth
with the alien and Big Mr. Brian
see him. And the big Mr. Brian
come and hit little Mr. Brian.
And Brown Mr. Brian comes and
kick at little Mr. Brian. Comes
and eat little Mr. Brian. Big
Mr. Brian come and eat little Mr. Brian.
Little Mr. Brian come out of Big Mr. Brian's
tummy.

Student 2 - There was a significant growth in word count and this directly connects with the subsequent growth of syntactic complexity(sentence length), showing almost 80% of the sentences being five or more words long. This student also moved from “subject + verb” (Mommy blows out candles.) to descriptive sequences (And the Mr. Brian is on the moon and bump his head and he grows smaller, smaller.)

Student 2
Start 1

November 2006

Happy birthday to our dear mother
Motherly always and ever, sister is
always gentle on the soft sister heart
to be more and more too and all
too many and gentle. Dear, love too.

memory
- sister
- no know
- daddy

word count: 32
sentences: 1 word: 0
2 words: 0
3 words: 1
4 words: 1
5 words: 11-3

vocabulary: birthday, blood, candle, party

January 20

Mr. Brian on the trip home Mr. Brian jumps over the fence Mr. Brian falls down in the tree. Nothing gets back so Mr. Brian's head Mr. Brian carry out at fish Mr. push Mr. Brian in the refrigerator Mr. Brian puts the hand between feet in tree and the fishes.

Mr. Brian
dolphin
of n =

and count ES
statements - found it
found it
found it
found it
found it

counting all things
verbally - push, trees, breathe

2
 2/19/75
 M. B. Baines
 McBrine groups off the coast of
 has a suit flying. He is going
 on top of an aliphine Elve drives
 the airplane so fast to the ground
 McBrine cut right and put on
 the suit and fly down the airplane
 McBrine and Elve then together
 they landed back on the glaciers
 McBrine saw a bird on the glacier
 saw "Bird coming to eat eagle
 from McBrine's hand. Davis saw
 McBrine jump against suit and
 the airplane. McBrine saw Davis
 and give flying suit. Davis has
 now one. McBrine don't get his
 airplane now McBrine jump against
 McBrine saw Davis the eagle and
 a Storker up there. McBrine go
 fly back home and to sleep.
 Monster is not McBrine's twin. Davis
 is McBrine's house. Davis says
 the monster and King him. Davis
 is so strong. He will take up
 McBrine's house and the parts
 on the ground so slowly. He
 McBrine the outside is moving
 McBrine Mr. Baines goes "a school"

[illegible]

FINDINGS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

Student 3 - This student consistently used 6 - 10 Tier 2 words per story, showing a steady grasp of more descriptive verbs and nouns. They also moved away from simple “subject + verb + object” patterns and increasingly using more six-plus word sentences.

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

FINDINGS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

Student 4 - The average sentence length grew significantly from story 1 having six five-plus word sentences to story 4 having 20. This displayed a much higher level of syntactic maturity and growth. This student also evolved from “subject + verb + object” in story 1 to complex, multi clause narratives by story 4.

Student 4
Story 1

A long time ago there was a monster
monster has a spine like a monster
And four people like to their house monster
And four people like to their house monster
And four people like to their house monster

monster
spine
people
hiding

word count: 93
sentences: 1 word: 0
2 words: 1
3 words: 0
4 words: 1
5+ words: 1

vocabulary: 15

Student 4
Story 2

Once upon a time Mr. Brian
jumped off the roof of the school
and landed in the water. He was
very happy. He was very happy. He
was very happy. He was very happy.
He was very happy. He was very happy.
He was very happy. He was very happy.

Mr. Brian
jumped
landed
happy

word count: 93
sentences: 1 word: 0
2 words: 0
3 words: 0
4 words: 0
5+ words: 1

vocabulary: 15

Student 4
Story 3

Mr. Brian plays with the friend school
Once upon a time Mr. Brian
crashed his head because it was
too big. He was sad. He was sad.
He was sad. He was sad. He was sad.
He was sad. He was sad. He was sad.
He was sad. He was sad. He was sad.

Mr. Brian
plays
friend
school

word count: 93
sentences: 1 word: 0
2 words: 0
3 words: 0
4 words: 0
5+ words: 1

vocabulary: 15

Student 4
Story 4

Spacely Butterfly Picnic April 27, 2002
Once upon a time a fairy had
a picnic. She was very happy. She
was very happy. She was very happy.
She was very happy. She was very happy.
She was very happy. She was very happy.

Spacely
Butterfly
Picnic

word count: 93
sentences: 1 word: 0
2 words: 0
3 words: 0
4 words: 0
5+ words: 1

vocabulary: 15

FINDINGS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

Student 5 - There is an upward trend in stamina increasing from 56 to 175-plus words and a syntactic complexity, moving almost exclusively to five-plus word sentences by story 4. This student also used more Tier 3 science related vocabulary in stories 3 and 4.

Student 5
Story 1

Number 10

There's a monster a spider web.
a spider a monster, who was and
killed. Monster eat the plate and
the food. The spider was too fat
and was eating a spider and the
monster. The monster killed the
spider made the long again. The
spider came. The food went to
the monster. The food got dirty
and dirty.

monster - spider

total count: 56
sentences: 1 part: 0
words: 6
words: 12
words: 0
words: 8
words: 18 U 1.7

Vocabulary: dirty, spider, web

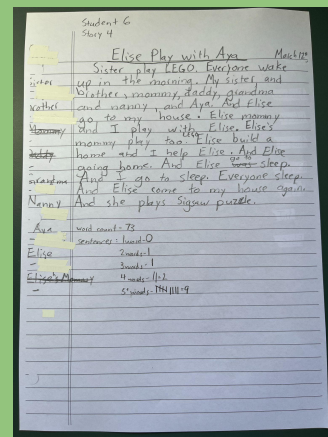
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Student 5
 April 3

...Laid on All Over the Place Stamp, did blow it
 long long time ago. There was
 6 pups. The names: Skip, Clara, Rocky, Emma,
 Everett, and Delaney. They were in the volcano
 and the lava had come. The volcano
 was erupting lava everywhere. The lava came
 from the lava cave in the volcano.
 Clara had a big giant ice cream
 cone and the dog ate it. It put out the lava
 stamp. Skip, Rocky, Emma, Everett and Delaney
 stayed in the cave. They were
 drinking tea. The lava came in
 the garbage and it boiling in
 the pot. The lava had the lava stamp
 on the ground. It was burning
 the lava. The pups felt the
 ground shake. Skip painted a volcano
 on the wall.
 The lava was in the cave for the
 lava pups. The lava had the lava stamp
 and Emma Rocky got his truck back
 and go in the water. He is looking
 at Red Rocky is going super close
 to the lava. Emma got in the lava with
 Skip. Everett got in the lava
 that was a volcano. Skip is
 feeling good. The lava is
 the lava. The pups finally got in the
 cave and rest.

[illegible]

Student 6 - This student began to show the use of prepositions in story 3, while using an almost identical sentence. In story 2 they said, "My mommy wake up the morning." In story 3 they said, "She wake up **in** the morning." This exploration, and growth, in prepositions can also be seen in comparing other parts of some of her stories.



OVERALL FINDINGS

- Four out of the six students showed consistent growth in the number of words they used in their stories. These same students showed a big growth in the use of five-plus word sentences.
- Three out of the six students showed a considerable increase in the use of both tier 2 and tier 3 words.
- All six students enjoyed not only telling their story for dictation, but also acting it out with their classmates.
- All students thought about the story they wanted to tell while they spoke. It was clear that some were thinking about their audience and how they would react to some of their ideas within their story.

DISCUSSION

- Originally my goal was to show that the use of storytelling and story acting directly causes a growth in a student's English language skills, but I have concluded that the data analyzed does not show where certain learning, such as vocabulary, or sentence structure, has come from. I still believe that it is beneficial for children to be able to share their voice, and also hear the stories from peers, with the possibility of learning from their peers.
- I have realized that the analysis of these stories, especially regarding tier 2 and tier 3 words, can help make connections between the vocabulary found and the vocabulary that is directly taught through read alouds in the classroom through dialogic reading groups and High Quality Read Alouds(HQR).This can help identify direct sources of teaching vocabulary for certain children.

DISCUSSION

- Since our Pre-K classes have a high percentage of English language learners, it is important for us to utilize different methodologies in sharing the English language with all students. The practice of storytelling and story acting allows all children the ability to share their level of English language with their peers, while they are also experiencing a variety of levels of English language from their peers. This reciprocity is delivered in a child-centered activity and connects easily with our Pre-K Reggio inspired program.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH

- After analyzing the stories of each of these six students, I have realized that storytelling can be a great way to assess a child's growth, specifically in tiered vocabulary use and syntactic complexity, such sentence length.
- The analyzing of data was made easier through the use of AI to sort through each story and categorize, and count, the tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 words.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH

- In order to see whether or not children are learning from their peers, I need to analyze all stories in a sequential order to see if there are certain tier 2 or tier 3 vocabulary words that appear in more than one story and are used in the correct context.
- I learned that, with the use of AI, it is possible to analyze all students work in the classroom without taking too much time. This would be beneficial in trying to determine the level of tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary being used in this context in the classroom.

LOOKING FORWARD

- Next school year I will begin the practice of storytelling and story acting much earlier, in September, to get more stories, which will lead to more samples for data analysis.
- In the future I can highlight certain tier 2 and tier 3 words in a child's story, after acting, to see if other children begin to use these words in their stories.
- Next school year I will analyze all of the students works and try to look for patterns, and repetition, in tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary.

LOOKING FORWARD

- I hope to share this study and it's findings with my Pre-K colleagues and show them how the stories can be used to collect data on tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary growth.
- The findings can also help us designate more resources, such as time and funding, towards PD on storytelling and story acting for our Pre-K team, and perhaps could include our Kindergarten team.

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