

Autobiographical Storytelling in English Language Arts Instruction: Fostering Literacy and Social-Emotional Development In the Elementary English Language Learner Classroom

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Abstract

Given the changing cultural and linguistic profile of the United States classroom, culturally relevant teaching strategies that address individual learning needs and establish meaningful learning contexts have become increasingly important for student success. The integration of autobiographical student narratives into traditional English language instruction via storytelling represents a promising area of educational research. The present study sought to investigate the extent to which storytelling facilitates inclusivity, fosters positive social-emotional development, enhances engagement, and contributes to gains in academic performance of elementary-aged English language learner (ELL) students. In a comprehensive literature review, this study explored storytelling in relation to classroom demographic profiles, literacy development, dynamics of interpersonal relationships, and mechanisms of student engagement and motivation. Storytelling in promoting language achievement and social-emotional development was evaluated through the lens of Gardner's social educational model of second language acquisition. Research found that fewer opportunities for open dialogue within diverse classrooms contribute to negative cultural stereotypes. Storytelling supports the social-emotional development of students by broadening cultural attitudes and affirming both peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships. Storytelling, compared to traditional instruction, better incorporates multimodal literacy skills into language. Additionally, storytelling increases student engagement by creating a meaningful learning context, which in turn heightens motivation and mediates positive academic outcomes. Four guidelines for storytelling-based language instruction in diverse classrooms emerged: (1) acknowledgement and acceptance of diverse student backgrounds, (2) legitimization of student experience and voice, (3) implementation of scaffolding techniques by teacher-storytellers, and (4) support of active student roles in learning.

Keywords: Storytelling, Literacy, English Language Learners

1. Introduction

The profile of the prototypical United States' classroom has experienced a dramatic transformation in the diversity of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such a change has rendered the addressal of diverse educational needs to be a relevant and timely issue for educators and policy makers alike. Estimates from the United States Census Bureau revealed that approximately one-third of newly enrolled students came from family backgrounds where English was not the primary home language¹. As reported by the National Center of Education Statistics, the percentage of public-school students who were English language learners (ELLs) increased from 8.1%, or 3.8 million students, in 2000 to 9.6%, or 4.9 million students, in fall 2016². Currently, over 400 languages and dialects are spoken within United States public schools³.

ELLs are described as individuals who possess a language background other than English and whose English proficiency is not yet developed to the point when they may benefit fully from English-only instruction. Beyond the changing demographic profile of the United States' educational system, problems have arisen in the disproportionate representation of ELL students as low performers. Strong English language skills are foundational to the academic and personal success of students in contemporary society, whether in daily navigation or occupational opportunities. Conversely, difficulties in language-related skills have corresponded with detrimental educational outcomes. According to Miller and Pennycuff, limited reading and writing skills not only restricted communication ability, but also protracted downstream achievement, with 75% of school dropouts reporting reading problems and 50% of adults with criminal records identifying with childhood reading difficulties⁴.

The academic achievement of ELL students has been consistently reported to be lower compared to their native English-speaking (NES) or monolingual peers. In 2008, the National Council of Teachers of English revealed that non-native-English-speaking secondary students were 21% less likely to complete high school, and only 4% of eighth-grade ELL students achieved proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress compared to 31% of all eighth-grade students⁵. More recently, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that, compared to 38% of fourth-grade, English as a first language (EL1) students, only 7% of ELL students performed at grade level⁶.

Given the changing student profile of the United States classroom, and the need for greater provisions for ELL students, culturally relevant teaching strategies that address individual learning needs and establish inclusive classroom environments have become increasingly important for fostering student success. In this respect, storytelling models of English language instruction that incorporate the autobiographical narratives of students into traditional curricula may serve as a novel educational practice and warrant further investigation.

2. Review of Literature

The present study sought to investigate the extent to which storytelling facilitates inclusivity, fosters positive social-emotional development, enhances engagement, and contributes to gains in academic performance of elementary-aged ELL students. In a comprehensive literature review, this study explored storytelling in relation to classroom demographic profiles, literacy development, dynamics of interpersonal relationships, and mechanisms of student engagement and motivation. The efficacy of storytelling in promoting language achievement and social-emotional development was evaluated through the lens of Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition. Gardner's model describes the varied mechanisms which underly second language acquisition⁷. Employing this framework, this study examined the role of social and cultural context in driving individual differences, which in turn inform practices of formal language instruction and informal language experience in the classroom. Further, this study discussed the application of findings towards advancing linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of literacy and social emotional development in young learners.

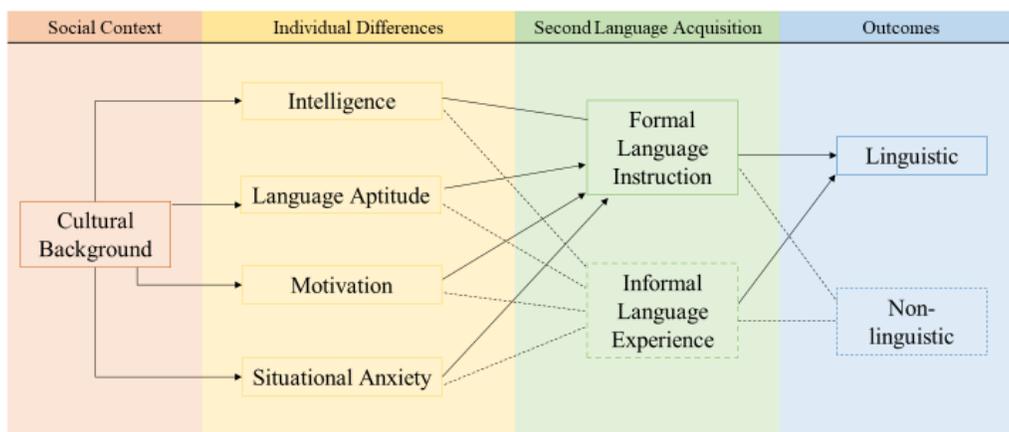


Figure 1. Adapted from Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition

2.1. Educating the Diverse Classroom

As the cultural and linguistic profile of the United States classroom has become increasingly diverse, there has arisen a need to develop both culturally relevant and individualized teaching strategies that effectively address students' specific learning needs. Currently, there is a substantial body of literature which espouses the benefits of classroom cultural diversity. Gottfried investigated the role of contextual peer factors on socio-emotional outcomes in both kindergarten and first grade samples⁸. Gottfried found that greater classroom diversity—defined by number of ELL classmates—corresponded with fewer problem behaviors (i.e., externalization of problem behaviors) and heightened socioemotional skills (i.e., self-control, approaches to learning, and interpersonal skills)⁸. While Gottfried suggests the many benefits of classroom diversity, other studies have noted the potential negative socio-emotional impacts posed by barriers to effective communication in diverse classrooms. One such barrier is conceptualized in cultural differences, which can result in critical misunderstandings between students. Enciso surveyed two ELL classrooms to determine student and educator perspectives, asserting that fewer opportunities to develop shared experiences and narratives contributed to the prevalence of negative stereotypes surrounding cultural norms and language proficiency⁹. Enciso also noted that immigrant and non-immigrant students were separated by pre-existing power structures that essentialized group differences and restricted opportunities for peer engagement⁹. Given the growing diversity of the American educational system, practices that reduce cultural barriers and inform open cultural attitudes are timelier and more necessary than ever.

In addition to cultural barriers, research suggests that there is a high percentage of linguistically diverse students, such as ELLs, whose difficulties in language-related skills and comprehension limit effective communication and protract both immediate and long-term academic success. Research has demonstrated that ELLs experience disproportionately high levels of academic failure despite representing one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States. In 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that, compared to 38% of fourth grade, EL1 students, only 7% of ELL students performed at grade level⁶. However, Silverman; O'Connor, Geva, and Koh; and Ludwig, Guo, and Georgiou suggested that second language (L2) and ELL students, when given proper support at the onset of formal language instruction, can attain academic performance similar to that of their monolingual peers regardless of primary linguistic background^{10,11,12}. For example, O'Connor et al. investigated literacy skill performance (i.e., phonological awareness (PA), orthographic processing, semantic knowledge, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension) in a diverse linguistic sample of fifth grade EL1 and ELL students¹⁰. In O'Connor et al., researchers identified the emergence of a “good comprehenders” profile that corresponded with high performance in word-level components of language development in both the ELL and EL1 samples¹⁰.

While such findings have positive implications for ELL students who receive extensive educational support at the onset of formal instruction, there are notably fewer studies that investigate the learning needs of students whose entry into formal schooling is delayed. In a study of 100 elementary-aged students, Reese, Suggate, Long, and Schauthency examined the relationship between oral narrative and reading skills in the first three years of formal reading instruction¹³. Reese et al. concluded that the complex conceptualization of oral language in upper-primary grades may explain the phenomenon that students who experience delays in formal reading instruction, including a significant proportion of the ELL population, often achieve word-level language proficiency at a rate on par with their EL1 peers when receiving proper instruction¹³.

Despite equal performance in word-level tasks compared to their EL1 peers, it has also been noted across studies that ELLs generally struggle with text-level comprehension. These discrepancies suggest a more nuanced relationship between general English skills and demonstrated performance in school than previously noted. According to O'Connor et al., Ludwig et al., and Reese et al., age greatly predicted performance in word-level comprehension compared to text-level comprehension^{11,12,13}. For example, Reese et al. noted that high performance in oral language skills is relevant in the preschool and kindergarten years, speculating that prior to the inception of formal reading instruction, oral language and literacy are largely undifferentiated skills¹³. Furthermore, Reese et al. indicated that the link between oral language and literacy reemerges after several years of formal instruction, typically beginning during the mid-primary years when students are first exposed to complex literary themes¹³. This transitional period, wherein a shift from “learning-to-read” to “reading-to-learn” occurs, represents a critical time for language interventions, particularly for low-performing language minority or ELL¹³. These findings also suggest that teaching strategies that specifically target text-level comprehension are of greater importance for older elementary students. Storytelling, which incorporates several high-level language processes, may therefore serve as an effective language learning intervention for upper-grade ELLs during this transitional period.

2.2. Narrative-Centered Instruction as a Novel Teaching Strategy

Academic achievement involves the mastery of multimodal skills of comprehension, fluency, and literacy. In Weddle, Spencer, Kajian, and Petersen, researchers detailed the components of both language complexity (i.e., temporal subordinate clauses, causal subordinate clauses, elaborated noun phrases, dialogue, temporal conjunctions, adjectives, and adverbs) and story grammar (i.e., character, problem, feeling, action, and ending)¹⁴. Given the intricate nature of language and literacy development, instructional models that simultaneously target multiple aspects of language acquisition are more likely to yield positive educational outcomes. To illustrate, Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance reported that children ages three to five showed improvements in textual comprehension after participating in a storytelling-based English language intervention¹⁵. Isbell et al. explored differences in story comprehension and language complexity in participant retells between a “story-telling” group in which children were told stories compared to a “story-reading” group in which children were read stories from a pre-selected book¹⁵. While both “story-telling” and “story-reading” groups demonstrated positive gains in oral language skills, results indicated that storytelling specifically increased story comprehension while story reading increased language complexity¹⁵. Weddle et al. extended the findings of Isbell et al. to a preschool population in a study investigating narrative language development of seven Spanish-speaking students in the southwestern United States¹⁴. Weddle et al. suggested that narrative language and story retells promoted improvements in story comprehension, memory, and expressive language skills among preschool ELLs¹⁴.

The advantages of storytelling-based language arts curriculum are further articulated in Reese et al., who claimed that strong narrative skills have far-reaching implications in improving the academic achievement and cognitive development of elementary-school students. In an investigation of oral narrative and reading skills as measured by performance in New Word Fluency (NWF) and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) tasks, Reese et al. observed the strongest correlations between oral narrative skills and reading performance for the orientation narrative variable (for NWF in Y1, $r=.34$, $p<.05$; for NWF in Y2, $r=.39$, $p<.05$; for ORF Y2, $r=.30$, $p<.05$), as opposed to the evaluation or story memory variables (for memory and NWF Y2, $r=.28$, $p<.05$; for all other comparisons, p =nonsignificant)¹³. That is, oral narrative skills related to temporal and causal terms were most associated with overall reading performance. Reese et al. noted that nonphonological aspects of language, such as oral narrative skills, contribute to greater comprehension of written material and fluency at a global level and concluded that early understanding of classical narrative structures is necessary for the proper development of later reading comprehension skills¹³.

2.3. Enhancing Student Connection with Learning

Because the exploration of personal narratives legitimizes personal experiences of students within the classroom context, storytelling also serves as a vehicle of developing social-emotional abilities in relation to performance skills (i.e., academic achievement), self-management skills (i.e., identity and esteem) and interpersonal skills (i.e., peer relationships). Weddle et al. found that narrative language and retells facilitated gains in students’ expressive language skills, which in turn may allow greater insight into the perspectives and needs of ELL students by strengthening communication skills¹⁴. In this line, it appears that storytelling supports the development of both performance and interpersonal skills by targeting expressive language ability. Hibbin evaluated the psychosocial benefits of an oral storytelling initiative among elementary-aged students and demonstrated that storytelling provides opportunities for self-expression, identification with story characters, and empathic understanding of the self¹⁶. Hibbin suggested that, through the re-narrativization of life experiences, individuals develop a greater capacity for self-awareness and understanding of self¹⁶.

Whereas Hibbin emphasized the importance of affirming personal experience in psychosocial development, Baskerville asserted the additional need for external storytelling encounters. In student-led discussions, students are provided the opportunity to apply prior knowledge to new experiences as well as to assimilate new information into existing perceptions in a reciprocal learning process. Employing a mixed approach of surveys, interviews, and participant observation, Baskerville examined the role of storytelling in promoting positive peer relationships and classroom cohesion between 24 culturally diverse, secondary school students¹⁷. Student responses were coded according to four sub-criteria: externalization, insight, judgement, and application. Over the period of four storytelling workshops, Baskerville noted a decrease in the number of “externalization” responses that corresponded with an emergence of “application” responses¹⁷. That is, as the storytelling process progressed, students’ capacities to integrate gained knowledge from peer stories to their own experiences were enhanced. Baskerville also noted that, as students shared personal experiences within a supportive learning environment, they demonstrated greater confidence and ease

in the learning process¹⁷. It is possible that, by fostering exploration of complex emotions and abstract conceptions within a structured narrative context, storytelling broadens children's existing social and emotional reserves.

In addition to advancing social-emotional development of students in school, greater identification with culturally familiar texts also enhances student engagement. Alexander, Miller, and Hengst examined characteristics of parent-guided narrative practice and story attachment in 32 preschool aged children and reported high proportion of attachments in written stories, video stories, and stories of personal experience¹⁸. Additionally, Alexander et al. noted that greater story attachment evoked story requests in 93% of participants, attentive listening in 85% of participants, discussions in 77% of participants, and retells in 52% of participants¹⁸. As story attachment increased, so did child participation. Alexander et al. surmised that participants were most drawn to stories that paralleled their own experiences and provided a basis from which they could map personal details of their identity¹⁸. It is possible that, through such a story mapping process, students are cognitively equipped to organize and relate new information with pre-existing schema. Relatedly, Baskerville noted that when students recognized commonalities between classroom learning material and personal experience, they displayed more engagement behaviors as demonstrated in greater incidence of laughter and attentive posture¹⁷. Baskerville observed that students underwent critical transformations from "listeners to tellers of stories" and concluded that, as the learning context became more relevant, participants were more likely to participate in discourse and interact with the learning material¹⁷.

2.4. Storytelling Broadens Attitudes and Reaffirms Social Relationships

2.4.1. *affirmation of peer-to-peer relationships*

Exposure to the personal narratives and autobiographies of others introduces young students to new cultural perspectives. Thus, storytelling-based educational models may broaden cultural attitudes and facilitate positive learning contexts that affirm peer-to-peer relationships. In an evaluation of traditional storytelling and literacy skills, Collins argued that, through storytelling, students are better equipped to resolve internal and interpersonal tensions and to articulate thoughts and feelings in a productive manner¹⁹. Such improvements in interpersonal skills may be explained by the findings of Hibbin, who attributed gains in social ability to unique opportunities for bi-directional communication among peers within the storytelling process¹⁶. Similarly, Baskerville suggested that students' acknowledgment of their commonalities supported their ability to reflect, understand, listen, and interact with others. In Baskerville's study of storytelling interventions in a middle-school classroom, students remarked that greater understanding of their peers through the sharing of personal stories allowed them to bond over commonalities in their individual experiences, with specific comments that "everyone was friendlier... and respected one another more" and "others took it in and spoke like they respected what was said"¹⁷. Baskerville further reasoned that, as students were exposed to diverse narratives and backgrounds, they formed alternative perspectives of their peers and were subsequently able to apply this new understanding to their own worldview, resulting in a shift in cultural attitudes¹⁷. In this way, narrative language and storytelling experiences are socially significant because they capture students' ability to listen and comprehend language, retain information in memory, and employ expressive language skills to convey new ideas to others.

In addition to changes in relational perspectives, notable shifts in relationship behaviors also occurred. Baskerville noted that, prior to the start of the study, students had unconsciously segregated themselves into different cultural groups; however, by the final storytelling workshop, groups of students had begun to intermingle¹⁷. It appears that peer-to-peer connectedness was built upon greater mutual understanding and trust facilitated by the sharing of intimate life details. Given the unique role of storytelling in destigmatizing difference and facilitating inclusive classroom conversation, storytelling has particularly relevant implications in culturally diverse classrooms wherein harmful stereotypes may otherwise perpetuate negative academic and social-emotional outcomes. For instance, Enciso, in a comparative survey of ethnopoetic narrative transcription between a culturally diverse classroom and NES classroom, reported that greater exposure to diverse narratives contributed to heightened interaction between students—NES students who had formerly expressed negative stereotypes of their peers⁹.

2.4.2. *affirmation of student-teacher relationships*

In addition to strengthened peer-to-peer relationships, classroom dynamics and power structures within student-teacher relationships also play a critical role in the development of interpersonal skills. Cultural competence among students and educators creates inclusive and accepting classroom dynamics where traditional hierarchies of power are reduced, and individual student voices are represented. Baskerville argued that the storytelling process cultivates

shared power relationships between students and teachers. Specifically, Baskerville speculated that as students progressed through the storytelling process, various developments altered levels of trust and ways of working with one another, ultimately reaffirming positive social relationships¹⁷. Baskerville identified one such development as the attitudinal shift in student participation wherein students transitioned from the role of “listeners” to the role of “storytellers”¹⁷. Over time, students began to voluntarily share their own stories after first hearing the stories of their teachers.

Baskerville attributed diminished power hierarchies between students and teachers to new learning styles inherent in storytelling—processes that deviated from traditional transmission styles of teaching and instead courted teachers and students as learning partners in two-way dialogue¹⁷. Others have also identified the potential benefits of co-creative, dialogic models of teaching. For example, Weddle et al. posited that narrative language instruction supported by a “teacher-storyteller” promotes specific opportunities for “[response], systematic scaffolding, and corrective feedback”¹⁴. Likewise, Collins asserted the critical role of competent “teacher-storytellers” in facilitating the storytelling process¹⁹. Specifically, Collins noted the use of sensory cues as a “scaffold” to allow the student to synthesize new ideas from guided instruction, ultimately forming connections between complex concepts and expanding topic comprehension¹⁹. Noting the support for scaffolding’s potential as an effective pedagogical strategy, language instruction which incorporates the practice may further advance learning by modeling appropriate language patterns.

2.4.3. *classroom environment and engagement*

Cohesive classroom relationships and inclusivity facilitate positive classroom environments, which in turn may lead to higher student engagement. Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey assessed classroom emotional climate (CEC), student engagement, and academic performance (i.e., year-end grades) within a diverse fifth- and sixth-grade English language arts (ELA) classroom²⁰. Reyes et al. hypothesized that teacher regard for individual student perspectives and promotion of autonomy and self-expression (i.e., factors of classroom emotional climate) were strong predictors of downstream academic engagement. Reyes et al. reported a significant main effect of CEC on year-end English language arts (ELA) grades ($t=3.72$, $p=.001$, $\delta=.39$), CEC on engagement ($t=3.73$, $p=.001$, $\delta=.51$), and engagement on year-end grades ($t=5.18$, $p<.001$, $\delta=.18$)²⁰. Reyes et al. reported final parameter estimates of lesser magnitude for the association between CEC and grades than for the association between both CEC and grades with engagement ($\gamma=3.05$ vs. 3.83 ; $t= 2.77$, $p=.008$, $\delta=.31$), demonstrating partial mediation of CEC on year-end grades by student engagement²⁰. Additionally, Reyes et al. speculated that when teachers foster a sense of community, respond to student needs, and build high-quality relationships— all characteristics of high CEC—positive academic outcomes are supported through greater enthusiasm about learning²⁰.

2.5. Storytelling Enhances Student Engagement

Because the practice of storytelling requires the student to assume an active and participatory role, storytelling models of language arts instruction may thereby enhance student engagement. Taboada, Townsend, and Boynton defined reading engagement as “involvement in reading activities in which the reader displays cognitively purposeful processes and motivational processes such as enthusiasm, interest, and curiosity that denote emotionally positive interactions with text”²¹. In Taboada et al., researchers evaluated both the motivational processes inherent in engagement, including reader involvement, curiosity, interest, perseverance, self-efficacy, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation, as well as other cognitive indicators, such as comprehension, summarizing ability, and activation of background knowledge²¹.

Numerous studies have reinforced the direct role of storytelling in enhancing reading engagement across student populations. For example, a study by Weddle et al. investigated the effect of targeted reading interventions on the narrative language development of linguistically diverse preschool students. Weddle et al. observed that narrative interventions improved story grammar and language complexity through practices of response, scaffolding, and corrective feedback¹⁴. Weddle et al. further suggested that the capacity for narrative language and storytelling corresponds with greater levels of active student involvement¹⁴. In a study evaluating teacher-guided storytelling and student engagement in a second-grade classroom, Agosto provided further support for this proposed relationship between narrative learning and engagement. Specifically, Agosto reported high levels giggling, story-related comments, and predictions during live oral retellings of short-form, fictional stories²². Agosto therefore proposed that increased cognitive engagement facilitates greater motivation and attention²². In a survey of middle-school students, Baskerville reported that, during student-led storytelling workshops, early adolescent students also demonstrated

more attentive listening and reflection, as indicated in increases in length of written responses to peer stories and decreases in the number of “no response” journal entries¹⁷. This attitudinal shift was further evidenced by researcher observations of increases in laughter, interactive banter, and relaxed body language over the duration of the four storytelling workshops, with the classroom teacher further noting that students “listened more intently” and “chattered less frequently”¹⁷. In addition to direct contributions to student engagement, storytelling also contributes indirectly to heightened engagement. For example, Hibbin and Baskerville suggested that personally relevant learning contexts increased student participation in discussion and resulted in greater engagement with learning material^{16,17}. For classrooms characterized by warm, respectful, and emotionally supportive relationships, Reyes et al. attributed gains in task performance to increased emotional investment in the learning process²⁰. Thus, it appears that narrative-based instruction serves as a reliable engagement strategy across age groups, from preschool-aged students to early adolescent students.

In the context of motivational learning, there are many existing theories as to the ways in which storytelling facilitates engagement. One possible explanation lies in the rich narrative elements invoked during the creation and reception of personal stories. Hibbin argued that storytelling, compared to the relative passivity of story reading, involved more enriching and interactive learning processes¹⁶. Agosto attributed greater cognitive engagement to the vivid imagery and descriptions involved in storytelling, suggesting that sensory-enhanced learning experiences heightened motivation to learn by recruiting student interest²². Similarly, Blommaert also noted that increased detail in textual productions more actively engaged the audience and encouraged attentive listening²³. Regardless of the underlying psychological mechanism, there is clear consensus within the literature on storytelling’s ability to encourage engagement and motivation to learn.

2.6. Student Engagement Mediates Academic Outcomes

Student engagement facilitates motivation to learn and therefore modulates academic performance. Because of this, teaching strategies that stimulate student engagement are critical to bolster both immediate and long-term educational outcomes. Effective learning, and therefore academic achievement, is contingent upon the extent to which students are invested in their own learning. In a longitudinal analysis of the academic failure-dropout relationship, Kaplan, Peck, and Kaplan noted that disengaged students performed at lower academic levels compared to their peers, were less likely to aspire to academic goals, and were more likely to drop out of school²⁴. Just as student disengagement corresponds with negative academic outcomes, high rates of student engagement are correlated with positive academic outcomes. Reyes et al. contended that academic success is contingent upon the social and emotional components of engagement and motivation. Indeed, in Reyes et al., researchers reported a similar mediation of academic achievement by student engagement ($t=5.18$, $p<.001$, $\delta=.18$), speculating that heightened engagement may correspond with long-term improvements in academic outcomes²⁰.

This pattern of engagement and achievement remains consistent within more specific parameters of English language learning. For example, in a study of 25 fifth-grade ELLs of majority Asian background and 63 sixth-grade ELLs of majority Hispanic background in the United States, Taboada et al. investigated the relationship between language proficiency, reading engagement, and reading comprehension²¹. Taboada et al. reported that, in both samples, reading engagement as measured by the Reading Engagement Index (REI) fully mediated the effect of general English language proficiency on reading comprehension (for fifth grade ELLs, $\beta = .766$, $p = .059$; for sixth-grade ELLs, $\beta = .225$, $p=.072$)²¹. Taboada et al. asserted that the cognitive dimensions of reading engagement served to energize word recognition and verbal skills involved in language proficiency. Taboada et al. concluded that prior research in L2 instruction and literacy development has focused too heavily on discrete language skills while neglecting the motivational processes crucial to language development²¹. Given the potential negative academic outcomes of disengagement and the demonstrated capacity of storytelling in increasing classroom engagement, novel models of language arts instruction that incorporate storytelling-based practices and activities may be effective in reducing risk of poor academic outcomes and increasing performance in end-of-term grades and standardized testing.

3. Emergent Guidelines for Storytelling-Based Language Arts Instruction

Because individualized models of storytelling in language arts instruction potentially enhance academic performance while facilitating cultural dialogues, they may also serve as more effective and culturally relevant teaching strategies for traditionally underperforming students. Taboada et al. suggested that the role of engagement in language development may be particularly important for students who struggle with oral and written components of English

literacy, most commonly adolescent ELLs²¹. Hibbin espoused similar support for storytelling-based educational models in the classroom, arguing that non-instrumental speaking and listening practices of storytelling are critical to the proper social-emotional development of young students¹⁶. Additionally, Weddle et al. claimed that early narrative language interventions in small-group instruction serve as currently unexplored methods of nurturing English language acquisition and social development in the elementary classroom¹⁴. Weddle et al. further asserted that narrative language interventions may also reduce the frequency of erroneous special education referrals by providing guidelines that distinguish between language disability and language difference to classroom educators¹⁴. Neglecting the potential of storytelling in language instruction in diverse classrooms may contribute to missed opportunities to support the literacy development of ELLs—a population which represents one of the fastest growing communities in the United States’ educational system. Conversely, striving towards inclusive and culturally relevant teaching strategies, such as storytelling-based instruction, may thereby narrow the achievement gap between ELLs and their peers.

Though many have noted the potential benefits of storytelling-based interventions within the classroom, there are few existing guidelines from which such interventions may be modelled. The present study expands current knowledge through the emergence of four guidelines for storytelling-based language instruction: (1) acknowledgement and acceptance of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, (2) legitimization of student experience and voice, (3) implementation of scaffolding techniques by teacher-storytellers, and (4) support of active student roles in learning. These four recommended guidelines are discussed in greater detail below.

Guidelines for Effective Storytelling-based Language Instruction
<p>(1) Acknowledgement and acceptance of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for cultural and linguistic diversity • Meaningful incorporation of students’ primary language • Sensitivity to prior educational experiences <p>(2) Legitimization of student experience and voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirmation of experience through collaborative learning • Fostering of inclusive and extended classroom language during discourse • Reinforcement of contextual definitions for learning • Inclusion of all students, including language minority and low performing students <p>(3) Verbal and procedural scaffolding by teacher-storytellers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic cognitive support through verbal language modeling (e.g., read-alouds, simplified speech) • Frequent learning reinforcement through mediation, response, and corrective feedback • Explicit procedural modeling in visuals and discussion prompts • Assessment of individual student performance and gains in performance <p>(4) Support of active student roles in learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement of peer collaboration during discussions • Assigning relevant and engaging activities which stimulate student interest • Presenting challenges in novel learning environments

Figure 2. Emergent guidelines for effective storytelling-based language instruction for language minority students.

In the acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity of students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, educators facilitate the creation of inclusive classroom dynamics. Enciso claimed that through student-led storytelling and narrative discussion, educators can create dynamic spaces for critical textual production regardless of high heterogeneity in cultural experiences or language⁹. By establishing respect, educators simultaneously establish safe learning environments. In the legitimization of student experience and representation of student voice, educators promote the development of important social emotional skills in elementary-aged students. Hibbin revealed that re-narrativization of life experiences in storytelling offers opportunities for expression, identification with others, and

empathic understanding of the self¹⁶. By fostering exploration of complex emotions and abstract conceptions within a structured narrative context, storytelling broadens children's existing social and emotional reserves. Through this process, students are presented a platform for open discourse, striving towards collaborative and inclusive learning. Scaffolding generally refers to the provision of contextual supports in learning, such as simplified language, visual and graphical cues, "hands-on" learning, and teacher modeling. In scaffolding, teacher-storytellers provide effective models of language learning and strategic cognitive support through mediation, response, and feedback. As discussed in Weddle et al. and Collins, educator adoption of the co-creative role of the "teacher-storyteller" allows the student to synthesize new ideas from guided instruction, ultimately forming connections between complex concepts and expanding topic comprehension^{14,19}. Finally, through the affirmation and encouragement of student roles in learning, educators enhance engagement in the learning process. Baskerville reported that, through storytelling, a transformation from "listeners to tellers of stories" occurred within previously disengaged or demotivated students¹⁷.

4. Conclusion

Storytelling-based language arts instruction, while not intended to entirely replace traditional instruction, may serve as an alternative and integrative method for educating an evolving American student population that possesses different educational needs than those of the past. By stimulating interest and contextualizing the learning process, students are charged to take an active stake in their own achievement. Though further investigation into educator training and real-world applicability is warranted, a storytelling-based language instruction certainly affords a promising outlook on the future of English language education.

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