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Elysia Lin

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Autobiographical Storytelling in English Language Arts Instruction: Fostering Literacy in the Elementary English Language Learner Classroom
Elysia Lin, Virginia Commonwealth University

Background
- The cultural and linguistic profile of US classroom has become increasingly diverse, with English language learners (ELLs) as growing population (14).
- ELLs disproportionately represent low-performing students compared to native English-speaking peers (10).
- Difficulties in language-related skills correspond with protracted academic achievement (9,10).
- Instruction that targets multiple aspects of language acquisition yield improved educational outcomes (18).

Culturally-relevant teaching strategies that address individual learning needs and establish meaningful learning contexts are important for student success. Narrative-driven storytelling models of English language instruction that may serve as novel educational practice.

Methods
In a comprehensive literature review, this study explored storytelling in relation to five focus areas:
- **Classroom dynamics**
- **Interpersonal relationships**
- **Engagement and motivation**
- **Academic performance**
- **Social-emotional development**

- **Classroom dynamics**
- Barriers to communication result in prevalence of negative stereotypes [5].
- Exposure to diverse narratives heightens student interaction and peer-to-peer connectedness [3,5].
- Inclusive classroom environments increase emotional investment in learning [13].

- **Interpersonal relationships**
- Increased communication contributes to gains in social ability and broadened cultural attitudes [6].
- Scaffolded language instruction supported by “teacher-storyteller” promote learning [4,15].

- **Social-emotional development**
- Storytelling facilitates gains in expressive language ability and communication skills [6,15].
- Re-narrativization of life experiences leads to greater capacity for self-awareness and self-understanding [6].
- Storytelling promotes confidence and ease in the learning process [3].

Engagement and Motivation
- Identification with culturally-familiar texts enhances active interaction with learning material [2].
- Storytelling provides enriching learning experiences, contributing to high levels of engagement behavior [3].
- Increased cognitive engagement facilitates motivation and attention [1,13].

Academic Performance
- Disengagement corresponds to low academic performance [8].
- Engagement mediates academic outcomes, such as language proficiency [12,13].
- Storytelling interventions employing nonphonological language skills promote comprehension and fluency [7,11,15].

Conclusions
- Exposure to diverse narratives broadens cultural attitudes affirms interpersonal relationships in positive learning contexts.
- Exploration of self-narratives legitimizes student experience and voice.
- Recruitment of multimodal language skills in storytelling enhances language proficiency.
- Storytelling enhances engagement, which in turn facilitates motivation to learn and contributes to improved academic performance.

References

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Discussion
Storytelling-based instruction may be evaluated according to Gardner’s model of Second Language Acquisition:

- **Social Context**
- **Individual Differences**
- **L2 Acquisition**
- **Outcomes**

Few frameworks for storytelling-based language instruction in diverse classrooms currently exist. From this study, four guidelines emerged:

1. **Achieve diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds**
   - Respect cultural and linguistic diversity
   - Incorporate primary language in meaningful ways
   - Remain sensitive to prior educational experiences

2. **Legitimize student experience and voice**
   - Affirm experience through collaborative learning
   - Foster inclusive and extended classroom language
   - Reinforce contextual definitions for learning

3. **Provide verbal and procedural scaffolding by teacher-storytellers**
   - Provide strategic cognitive support via oral language modeling
   - Reinforce learning via mediation, response, and corrective feedback
   - Assess individual student performance and gains

4. **Support active student roles in learning**
   - Encourage peer collaboration during discussions
   - Assign relevant and engaging activities to stimulate student interest
   - Support exploration in novel learning environments