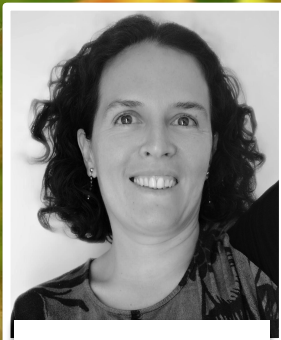




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#storytelling



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SHORT & SWEET - INFOGRAPHICS
Reflective Practice

APAC'S TOOLKITS
Oral Practice Resources



A journal for teachers,
created by teachers

Welcome to APAC's new issue!

APAC's ELT Journal is an electronic journal for English teachers working in Catalonia and beyond. APAC publishes three issues of the journal per year. APAC members receive it first, and at the end of the year all issues are made available [online](#).

If you would like to contribute to the journal, first have a look at our [publishing guidelines](#). You can also [get in touch](#) with us to discuss your ideas for other formats or any questions you may have.

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APAC board contributors

Àngels Oliva, Iolanda Ribes & Sílvia Borrell

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A quick note (sort of) from the editorial team

As we all readjust to school life, here at APAC we're starting the academic year with the full-on determination to break the boundaries between the classroom and the world. As teachers, we cannot ignore the issues that affect our students: Our role in the climate emergency, the spread of fake news, the restriction of civil liberties we had taken for granted, the challenge to consumerism, stark social inequalities... We are living through complicated times, and as teachers it's hard (and possibly unfair) to keep the world out of our sessions because that means losing our students' interest and losing the chance to educate global, engaged citizens for a better future.

This issue is packed to the brim with experiences, resources and methodological inspiration. We start off with a paper by **Julie Waddington** and **Sílvia Pardàs** that describes the impact of having students read to their younger peers. In the second paper, **Annabel Fernández** narrates her experiences as an EAP teacher in Bristol and makes us all want to pack and go. Inbetween these two, the second **infographic Short & Sweet**, this time presenting some ideas about reflective practice. After that, a fab list of resources you can use to get even your shyest students talking like there's no tomorrow - **APAC's Toolkit number 2**. Finally, **Sílvia Borrell interviews Lesley Denham**, a fantastic teacher and teacher trainer who has had a tremendous impact on many of us English teachers.

And don't forget to check out the call for papers for APAC's [annual ELT Convention](#), *Going Global*, also at the end of this issue. If you have any ideas, experiences or materials you would like to share, the call for papers is still open! And remember that you can still submit your project to the [John McDowell Awards](#), organised jointly by APAC, the **British Council** and **Trinity College London**.

Enjoy this new issue, and may all your ideas run free!

APAC's Editorial Team

Teaching methodology

Did they really learn how to learn?

Results from Our Storytelling Circle

Written by Julie Waddington (UdG) and Sílvia Pardàs, Escola La Branca

Abstract

This article reports on the implementation of a whole-school storytelling methodology in preschool and primary education, which is also relevant to secondary school teachers. Links to video recordings are provided to demonstrate work carried out and to illustrate the different ways in which upper primary school students deliver a storytelling session using a picturebook of their own choice. Applying a qualitative approach based on teacher and student perspectives, a study is carried out to explore the extent to which the experience contributes to the development of the learning to learn competence. Results indicate that the different dimensions of the competence are developed during the experience; with the development of positive attitudes to learning being highlighted as one of the most important outcomes.

Image by Tumisu, from Pixabay



“Evidence provided over a three-year period [...] shows that children of this age are not only capable of rising to this challenge [delivering a storytelling session in English], but that the challenge itself has a positive effect on their language learning and self-concept”

Context

Two years ago, at the APAC ELT Convention 2017, I, the leading author, presented a cyclical storytelling methodology to harness the pedagogical potential of authentic picturebooks throughout the different stages of compulsory education. Details of the methodology design and rationale are provided in the follow-up article ‘Competency-Based ELT: Learning to Learn through Our Storytelling Circle’ (Waddington, 2017). The most distinctive feature of the approach is that the children themselves become the leaders of the storytelling process with the guidance and support of their teachers. During the experimental phase, initial responses from participating teachers and students revealed high levels of motivation and interest. After working closely with the second author of this paper during the implementation stage of the project, my aim at the 2019 Convention was to report on progress made; to demonstrate some of the work carried out by participating students (video recordings); and to share results from both the teachers’ and students’ perspective. One of the key questions that remained to be addressed back in 2017 was whether children in the upper cycle of primary education would be able to complete the task of preparing and delivering a storytelling session in English. Evidence provided over a three-year period with heterogeneous student groups shows that children of this age are not only capable of rising to this challenge, but that the challenge itself has a positive effect on their language learning and self-concept (Waddington, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The title of this paper refers back to the subtitle of the 2017 article, ‘Learning to learn through our storytelling circle’, which, in turn, alludes to one of the key competences to be developed within the framework of the Catalan competency-based primary education curriculum (Departament d’Ensenyament, 2017). Key competences are defined as those which are relevant to all members of society and are essential for an individual to be socially included and employable. The importance of focusing on competences in education is highlighted in the following extract:

A competence is defined as something beyond skills and knowledge, for example Kegan (2002, p. 2) discusses that the “great benefit to a concept like ‘competence’ is that it directs our attention beneath the observable behavioral surface of ‘skills’ to inquire into the mental capacity that creates the behavior. And it directs our attention beyond the acquisition of ‘knowledge’ as storable contents (what we know) to inquire into processes by which we create knowledge (how we know)” (Hoskins & Fredriksson, 2008: 11).

With regard to the learning to learn competence, Hoskins and Fredriksson explain that it has become a political priority in education precisely due to the link between its development and lifelong learning and social cohesion in the Information Age (2008: 16). When it comes to defining the competence, different definitions are available, such as the one offered by the EU working group on Key competences – “the ability to pursue and persist in learning” – or the process-centred approach adopted by The British Campaign for Learning, defining the competence “as a process of discovery about learning [involving] a set of principles and skills which, if understood and used, help learners learn more effectively and so become learners for life. At its heart is the belief that learning is learnable” (pp. 17-19). Emphasising the importance of this transversal competence, a document provided by the Catalan Ministry of Education encourages teachers to identify specific components of the competence and suggests methodological approaches to develop them and assess them within the primary classroom context (Departament d’Ensenyament 2018). These components are organised into four dimensions, as indicated below:

- **Self-awareness in relation to learning** – refers to the process of becoming aware of one’s own strengths and weaknesses as well as the strategies that help us learn.
- **Individual learning** – refers to the student’s capacity for making decisions and organising their own learning to make it effective and long-lasting.
- **Group learning** – refers to the student’s ability to learn with others in a cooperative way so that each member of the group achieves their goals.
- **Positive attitude to learning** – refers to the need to find the most suitable aspects that provide the motivation which is essential to achieve established goals and continue learning for life.

This four-dimensional framework will help us reflect on the results of the project implementation and to answer the question announced in the title of this paper: Did they really learn how to learn?

Design

The project was designed to be applied in the context of a rural school which promotes close coordination between the preschool and primary stages of education. It was conceived as a cyclical project in which the students’ role develops, becoming progressively more active in the storytelling process; from the earliest stages of initial input (listening to stories), to the later stage (upper cycle of primary), when they prepare their own storytelling sessions to deliver to younger learners in the school. A storytelling routine/format was designed to provide an approach which could be adopted and shared by adult storytellers (teachers, volunteers), and which would also serve as a model to guide the older children and provide a focus for the competency-based tasks they would carry out to prepare their storytelling sessions.

A website was created to store key resources and to be able to share video recordings with participants: <https://sites.google.com/view/our-storytelling-circle-jw/home>. In the first instance, a model video (shown at the 2017 APAC Convention) was created to illustrate the different phases of the storytelling routine. A description of these phases and the video model created can be found under the Highlights section of the website. An action plan was drawn up to identify and organise the sequence of competency-based activities that would help upper cycle children prepare the storytelling sessions they would deliver to younger children at the end of the year. Examples of the content of these sessions and the specific (foreign language) and transversal (e.g. learning to learn) competences worked on are provided in Table 4 of the 2017 article (Waddington, 2017: 22).

Implementation

In this section we show how students delivered their storytelling sessions using the picturebooks they had selected at the beginning of the year, and following the routine illustrated in the model video/session. Students had spent two terms preparing these sessions and had been guided to adapt their sessions appropriately to the age of their listeners: teachers had decided which class they would visit, depending on the picturebook chosen. Six storytelling sessions have been selected to illustrate how the different phases of the routine are carried out by different groups of students. Table 1 indicates the particular phase being worked on, the picturebook used, and the class the session is being delivered to. The last two columns provide details to help the reader locate the clip in the corresponding videos on the website.

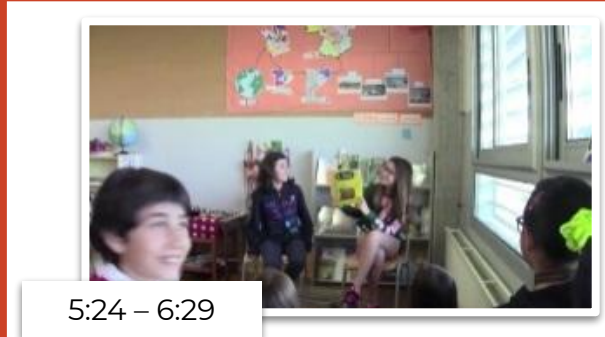

The hard work invested by the students in the different phases of the storytelling routine illustrates that the success of the experience goes far beyond their ability to understand a story and tell it to others. Instead, careful preparation of all the different phases help their listeners 1) be engaged/interested in the story; 2) understand the language used and the meaning of the story; 3) interact with the story and try out the language themselves; 4) experiment with the language while having fun; 5) interact in authentic communicative exchanges with their peers.

Thus, in the first example using *Dear Zoo*, the two 5th-year students begin their session by creating a relaxed and comfortable environment, saying hello to each (4 or 5 year-old) child in turn and prompting them to say hello back. Apart from gaining their attention and giving them an opportunity to use English in an authentic exchange, addressing each child using their name encourages them to feel included and to participate in the experience. In the next two examples (*Shark in the Park* and *Don't Forget the Bacon*), the storytellers use different strategies to elicit key vocabulary and expressions used in the story.

Table 1. Upper cycle primary students delivering storytelling sessions

Routine	Picturebook	class	Screenshot & times
Welcoming/ greeting listeners	<i>Dear Zoo</i> , Rod Campbell	P4	 0:00 to 00:44
Introducing key vocab/ expressions	<i>Shark in the Park</i> , Nick Sharratt	P4 & P5	 1:28 to 2:17
	<i>Don't Forget the Bacon</i> , Pat Hutchins	Year 3	 0:50 to 2:24
Narrating story encouraging listeners to interact	<i>Walking through the Jungle</i> , Julie Lacome	Year 2	 1:34 to 3.24
	<i>Ten Little Rubber Ducks</i> , Eric Carle	Year 1	 0:34 to 2:20

Table 1. Upper cycle primary students delivering storytelling sessions

Routine	Picturebook	class	Screenshot & times
Follow-up game/activity	<i>Oi Frog</i> , Kes Gray & Jim Field	Year 4	
Closing session/saying goodbye	<i>Dear Zoo</i> , Rod Campbell	P4	

In the first example, the storytellers use flashcards (created by themselves) to elicit the language from the listeners, pausing to praise them when they produce the correct terms. Preparatory work had been carried out during a previous class, in which the listeners had completed a worksheet created by the storytellers introducing key vocabulary from the story. In the second example, storytellers adopt a different strategy, using realia found in the school (chairs) or brought from home (cape) to elicit some of the key expressions needed to follow the complex narrative of this picturebook (*Don't Forget the Bacon*). They also use drilling techniques to practise the new language, asking the listeners to repeat some expressions (e.g. “a pile of chairs”) to increase their chances of recognising and understanding the language when they hear it in the story. The storytellers of *Ten Little Rubber Ducks* use a similar strategy, using realia (rubber ducks, a box, etc.) to illustrate narrative events. In their case, they decide to blend phases 2 and 3 together, eliciting key vocabulary (e.g. colours) and introducing new words (ducks’ bills) while narrating the story. Even when listeners are not explicitly prompted to interact, we find spontaneous examples of interaction, such as the girl making the gestures of a quacking duck (5:12 -5:14), indicating her engagement with the story despite the complex language of this particular picturebook.

The storytellers of *Walking in the Jungle* adopt clear strategies to encourage their listeners to interact with the narrative, waiting for students' responses after the sequence on each page, asking "What do you see? Can you hear a noise? What could it be?" In addition to the visual clues on the picturebook page, they provide the listeners with further prompts using sound effects (making the noise of the animal) and putting on masks (created by themselves) showing the animals' faces. Following this pattern for each animal encourages the children to join in and creates a positive environment in which both listeners and storytellers have fun with the story.

After narrating the stories, and in line with the routine established, most storytelling groups organise simple follow-up activities or games (e.g. Simon Says, Eye Spy, etc.) related to the theme of their story or to some of the language worked on. In the case provided in Table 1 (Oi Frog), the storytellers working with this linguistically challenging picturebook follow up their narration with a different kind of activity, showing a PowerPoint presentation they had prepared to retell the story and using a choral drilling technique to encourage listeners to join in with the repeated structure "(name of animals) sit on (objects sat on)". In most cases, the storytellers decided to close their sessions by giving the listeners a handcrafted gift to remind them of the story. This provides further opportunities for authentic communicative exchanges between students, as we see in the case of Dear Zoo, with the preschool listeners being addressed individually once again by their older primary school peers. Some months after the sessions, one of the preschoolers' parents commented on the fact that her daughter often took out the puppet (gift) at home, talking to it and playing with it. This suggests that the personalised gift reminding them of the story, and the experience in general, has a lasting, positive effect and stimulates further thought processes for these young children.

Results

After sharing some of these clips during the APAC Convention workshop, attendees discussed the following question in small groups: "In what ways do you think they (the storytellers) learned how to learn?" After some initial ideas focusing more on what they learned (for example lexical sets related to picturebook topics), discussion turned to what they were actually doing (for example working collaboratively in small groups), and how this contributed to developing their capacity to learn. The question therefore shifts our attention "beyond the acquisition of 'knowledge' as storable contents (what we know)", encouraging us to "inquire into processes by which we create knowledge (how we know)" (Hoskins & Fredriksson, 2008: 11).

Some participants were surprised by the level of autonomy shown by the storytellers and the marginal role played by the teacher during the sessions (this role was carefully cultivated and the level of autonomy achieved was the result of preparation and planning during two school terms). Other participants were surprised by the way some storytellers used techniques that some educators may find outdated or questionable, such as choral drilling and asking students to "repeat after me". On the one hand, this could indicate that students are replicating

what they are familiar with, or, having been placed in the role of teacher, that they are doing what they think a teacher should do. On the other hand, the practice could provide insight into what children find helpful in their own learning experiences and the processes they consider effective for driving learning forward in others.

After sharing these ideas, I presented some of the results of the project implementation based on teacher and student perspectives. These results have been summarised in Table 2 and organised in line with the four dimensions of the learning to learn competence discussed earlier.

Table 2. Overview of student and teacher perspectives of the Storytelling experience

Dimension of learning to learn competence*	Student perspective	Teacher perspective
Self-awareness in relation to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important to try to overcome shyness/reticence • Resources can help us (dictionaries, IT, teacher, peers) • Our behaviour matters (to us and to others) • You have to make an effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (through working on the task in groups); they enjoy making the most of their strengths and develop strategies to try to improve, manage or mitigate their weaknesses
Individual learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We like being able to make our own decisions (which picturebook to use, how to deliver the session, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be adapted/personalised to suit different student needs • Students learn new language in a meaningful context (more enduring)
Group learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to listen to others and respect turn-taking • Some of us wanted to be in different groups (with our friends), but we made the most of it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group work presents real advantages, but also challenges

Table 2. Overview of student and teacher perspectives of the Storytelling experience

Dimension of learning to learn competence*	Student perspective	Teacher perspective
Positive attitude to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We looked forward to our storytelling sessions We'd like to tell more stories in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project motivates children to learn English (without them realising they're doing it!)

*According to the four dimensional framework proposed in Departament d'Ensenyament (2018)

Student and teacher perspectives indicate that the experience did in fact help these primary school students to learn how to learn, in line with recent calls for such approaches in ELT (Ellis & Ibrahim 2015). Most notably, the experience stimulated more self-awareness in relation to how they learn and what they need to do to maximise their learning. In this way, they became more aware of their own individual needs and learning preferences, while also becoming more sensitive to the needs of others and to the value of collaborative work. In terms of the lasting effect of the experience, the development of positive attitudes to learning is probably the most important outcome and will underpin the development of students' "ability to pursue and persist in learning", which has been described as the essence of the learning to learn competence (Hoskins & Fredriksson, 2008: 17).

Closing comments

The results discussed above have been presented in a summarised way due to space restrictions. A more in-depth study discussing the effect on students' foreign language self-concept and highlighting the importance of self-efficacy beliefs can be found in Waddington (2019).

Some attendees at the workshop wanted to know more about the work involved in preparing the storytelling sessions. Although a description of the main characteristics and overall design can be found in the previous APAC ELT Journal article (2017), this does not provide a close-up view of how the preparatory sessions were developed. I have attempted to address this in the article "Motivating self and others through a whole-school storytelling project: authentic language & literacy development", which is currently under review. The article provides a detailed description of some of the classes (referred to as storytelling preparation workshops),

taking examples which help illustrate the different cross-curricular areas focused on by students: linguistic, artistic, IT. The article also includes a review of some of the key research which can help us understand the significance and role of storytelling with picture books in language and literacy development; particularly in ELT (see Fleta, 2019). I will make every effort to share this with the APAC community as soon as it is published.

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About the authors



Julie Waddington teaches on the degree programmes in Preschool and Primary Education at the University of Girona. She enjoys developing research projects in schools (such as the project described in this paper) and has also worked as a teacher trainer for the Catalan Ministry of Education. With a PhD in Literary Studies and Critical Theory (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), and as a member of the Cultura i Educació research group (Institut de Recerca Educativa, UdG), she enjoys applying critical theory to language education and is particularly interested in questions of learner identity. Her current teaching practice and ELT research interests are also informed by her earlier training as an EFL teacher and experience as a full-time English teacher in language schools in England and Catalonia.

julie.waddington@udg.edu [@juliewaddy](https://www.instagram.com/juliewaddy)



Sílvia Pardàs has enjoyed working as both a generalist teacher and specialist English teacher at different schools in Catalonia. Actively involved in various innovation projects, she enjoyed working at the Camp d'Aprenentatge Empúries, developing heritage education programmes promoting autonomous student learning and harnessing new technologies. She spent the last years of her professional teaching career working as an English teacher at CEIP La Branca (ZER Montgrí, Baix Empordà) before retiring in 2019. During this period she worked in close collaboration with Julie Waddington to design and implement the Storytelling Circle project, which has now become a permanent feature of the school's language and literacy programme.