

Stories and Storyline

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Endorsement by the Series Editor

This is a very unique book because it brings together a wealth of useful practical and theoretical insights about using stories of all kinds in language learning classrooms. Both authors are talented classroom researchers as well as inspirational classroom practitioners who generously share their ideas with readers in this volume. The enthusiasm with which they present the ideas and describe their own experiences is infectious. The volume is aimed at teachers, researchers, and teacher trainers who are interested in primary and secondary level language learning and teaching, but most of the ideas offered here are also applicable to adult learners. The underlying research is presented in an accessible style and the classroom activities are described in sufficient detail for anyone to try them out straightaway. I am sure this book will become a real favourite with teachers all over the world.

Annamaria Pinter, Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK

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Chapter 1: Young Learners

Sharon Ahlquist

Introduction

Who are we?

Sharon Ahlquist has worked as a teacher trainer at Kristianstad University in the south of Sweden for 15 years, teaching English on both pre-service and in-service courses for primary and secondary teachers, specializing in classroom methodology, including Storyline. Réka Lugossy started her career as a primary and secondary school teacher of English, first in Transylvania (Romania), then in Hungary. She has worked as a teacher trainer at the University of Pécs in Hungary for 20 years, teaching courses on how to apply narratives in TEFL, and on exploring teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. Both of us are convinced of the power of narrative in language education. Sharon completed her Doctor of Education degree, 'The impact of the Storyline approach on the young language learner classroom', in 2011. Réka earned her PhD in Applied Linguistics in 2008, completing her thesis on 'Constructing knowledge through experiences with narratives in natural and instructed settings'. Both of us are classroom teachers at heart. We work with stories in our teaching, and our research interests include the ways in which the story form can promote language acquisition in learners at various stages of language development. With this book we hope that our combined knowledge and experience will inspire you to embrace the story form and to use it as the basis for exploring the learning which occurs in your own classroom.

This book

In a nutshell, this book is about different kinds of stories, used in a variety of ways, with a common purpose: to develop the communicative language skills of young learners of English. We see the book as being useful to teachers working in a variety of settings at both primary and secondary level: where English is taught as a foreign language in either state or private schools; in schools in English-speaking countries where English is an additional language (EAL) for children who have another first language (L1). By children, we mean the 6-16 age group – an age range we should, perhaps, instead refer to as young learner. In the chapters which are to come, we will present a rationale for why stories should be used with this age group in the language classroom, not as

pleasant reading or listening activities when the real work is done, but as real work. To do this we will present research-based support for the structured use of stories and research which has been conducted in the field. We will suggest practical ways of working with stories and also consider how teachers might explore the pedagogical benefits of using stories of different kinds for themselves. Although the focus of the book is the teaching of English, the ideas, techniques and research findings will also be of interest and of use teachers of other languages and are adaptable to a wide range of teaching contexts.

We would like to claim that this book is unique in the market. In recent years, there has certainly been an increase in the number of publications related to stories. However, as some of the titles suggest - *Tell it again! The new storytelling handbook for primary teachers* (Ellis & Brewster, 2002), *Using folktales* (Taylor, 2000) and *Storytelling with children* (Wright, 2009), most of the available books are related to practical ideas rather than empirical research. Empirical studies exploring the processes and outcomes for language and literacy of using stories with children have mostly been carried out in an L1 context, for example, Elley (1989). However, little has been published on the benefits of using stories with children in second language education. Rare examples are Enever and Schmid-Schönbein (2006), and Bland and Luetge (2013). However, these edited volumes do not aim to provide a theoretical overview of the underlying principles. A recent publication which proposes both theoretical foundations for using literature and a practical model of literature-based instruction backed up by research is Ghosn's *Storybridge to Second Language Literacy* (2013).

In contrast to the growing interest in the subject of stories amongst both language teachers and researchers, there is no book available which integrates theoretical perspectives, empirical research and practical guidance for teachers who want both to work with stories and to investigate the social, psychological and linguistic benefits of story-work in their classrooms.

This book aims to fill the gap. Featuring two very different learning and ethnolinguistic contexts (Hungary and Sweden), it reports on and suggests opportunities for practice-based research in domains which have been under-explored in language teaching: on the one hand, the role of stories and how teacher beliefs and practices regarding stories have long-lasting implications for the educational culture, and on the other, the Storyline approach. Storyline, as it is often simply called, originated in the 1960s in Glasgow as an attempt to address the curriculum requirement for interdisciplinary teaching in primary schools. A fictive world is created in the classroom, with learners, working in small groups, taking on the roles of characters in a story which unfolds over a number of weeks. The story develops as the learners work

together on key questions. These key questions structure the events of the story (just as chapters in a book do) and involve the learner in a range of tasks linked to the syllabus targets. The tasks integrate practical and theoretical subjects, and involve holistic use of the language skills. One Storyline topic, which we will return to, concerns a number of families who move into a newly built street. The learners, working in small groups, create the families and their houses. The scene is then set for the ‘incidents’ - things which happen in the story. It might be that a troublesome family moves into the one remaining house and the neighbours have to decide what to do.

By examining work with stories and Storyline, with Hungarian and Swedish learners of English, the book aims to add new empirical data to this topic. Although the research contexts themselves are specific, we believe that the findings are of interest and of practical application to a much wider audience of teachers internationally.

The book is divided into two closely connected sections. The first, by Réka (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5), presents current psychological and language learning theories and research related to narratives; it looks at the existing research on the use of stories and their effects on young learners, their teachers and on the close community. It also points to directions for future research and gives suggestions both for practical classroom work and empirical studies. The second section, by Sharon (Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9), discusses the benefits of stories beyond those of narrative; provides practical suggestions for how you can work with Storyline and study the impact of working in this way on your own pupils, and also considers the limited existing research. Our belief is that theory and practice inform one another. While theory provides a framework for what we do in the classroom and how we do it, what happens in practice both broadens and deepens our theoretical knowledge base.

First a word about terminology: following Pinter (2011) we will distinguish between the terms acquire/acquisition and learn/learning only where such a distinction is helpful. The term acquire is often used to describe what the learner picks up incidentally, either from living in a country where the L2 is spoken by the majority of the population, or from watching television or reading in the L2 while living in an L1 context. This is distinguished from what is learnt formally at school. There is, of course, considerable overlap between the processes of acquisition and learning, particularly in countries where English is taught as an L2 and where television programmes are not dubbed into the L1, as is the case in the Nordic countries, for example. Learners in these countries have rich opportunities to acquire the L2 through informal exposure to the spoken language alongside formal classroom instruction.

Before we start to discuss the nature of stories and what they can offer the language learner, let’s think about the characteristics of the young learner, who is at the

heart of this book. What do we know about young language learners? Why is it important to include more story work in language teaching?

[*\[Purchase the ebook\]*](#)

Message from the Publisher

We hope you enjoyed this reading sample. It has been a real privilege to work with Sharon, Réka and Annamaria on this wonderful book and we are certain that teachers everywhere will find it useful and engaging. Please see the website for details on how to order the full text. If you would be interested in a review copy, please get in touch. We would also like to hear from you if you might be interested in writing for us. We are currently working on developing a collection within four series:

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