

Cultural Storytelling as a Motivational Writing Prompt for English Language Learners: A Collaborative Research Endeavor

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ABSTRACT: This qualitative study addresses the question "Does the use of storytelling motivate English language learners to engage in literacy practices more, or in a better way, and if so, how?". Storytelling of cultural tales related to fifth grade students' home cultures was introduced to provide a prompt for resultant student discussion and writing. All data collected – a writing attitude survey, writing samples, recordings of group discussions, and a final interview – display the literacy growth of Raeda, a newly emigrated girl from Bangladesh. A primary theme that emerged from this study was that the storytelling of cultural tales as discussion and writing prompts is a motivational factor in the process of learning a second language. This article also recounts the challenges and rewards of a year of collaborative instruction between a university faculty member and an English language learner teacher in a Professional Development School. The PDS partnership laid the foundation for this collaborative research to occur. The research endeavor positively affected all stakeholders – students, pre-service teachers, the in-service teacher, and the university professor.

NAPDS Essential(s) Addressed: #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #5/Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; #8/Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

I feel bad and good [about going to middle school]. My good think is everybody get a locker and learning about new things. My bad think is when I forgot my locker number and my classroom ... When I go middle school I miss my teacher and this school ... I don't going middle school ... I love [this] elementary school. I never forgot my principal ... I miss every body. I love it my Elementary school

- Excerpt from Raeda's "Going to middle school" essay, May 2010

Raeda (pseudonym) emigrated from Bangladesh to the United States and enrolled in a Maryland elementary school in October. She had some written literacy skills in English that were stilted and formulaic. This excerpt was from her writing "Going to middle school" in May of that year, after she had gained some comfort level with English. Her journey as a

student and writer of English is one focus of this article. The other is the collaborative endeavor that attributed to her success in school. With that introduction, let us start at the beginning of the story.

Contexts

Carolyn is a teacher education faculty member at a university which maintains a state-mandated relationship with schools in the local county. These Professional Development Schools (PDS) offer Carolyn and her pre-service teachers the opportunity to build long-term relationships with the students, teachers, and administrators at the local schools framework (Holmes Group, 1995). The PDS partnership benefits all parties. College students who are pre-service teachers are provided with mentoring by the school's teachers. The school's students receive extra support with the addition of another trained adult in the classroom in the form of a student teacher. PDS mentor teachers benefit also by having this assistance in the classroom as well as by learning about new teaching strategies from the university interns and professor. The university teacher education faculty keep abreast of current practices by being engaged with the teachers and students at the PDS.

Carolyn's university has had a PDS relationship with this school since 2004. In 2009 the teacher education department decided to increase the benefits of the PDS relationship by implementing a program called Professor-in-Residence (PIR). The university invited PDS personnel to discuss creating and defining the PIR position. The PIR would be assigned to one school for a two-year term, receiving load credit for supervising student teachers and conducting a course for the student teachers on the school property. This more permanent relationship afforded the professor the opportunity to become more engaged in the life of the local school. This relationship provided a way to create a stable learning community where students and

educators at both institutions could benefit from the long-term nature of the collaboration framework (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

As a newly-minted PhD and university faculty member who had spent 25 years as a teacher, Carolyn was thrilled to have the opportunity to return to the elementary school arena. She was excited to work with children again and to be actively engaged in a school community. As an added benefit, the PIR program ensured that she would remain with the same school for two years, thus making it easier to establish a research relationship framework (Kochan, 1998).

However, with this opportunity came the challenge of building relationships framework (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008). Positive working relationships are foundational, not only to the concept of the PDS, but also to the success of collaborative research. Sharing common beliefs about teaching and learning, such as having similar vision and mission statements, are essential for creating collaborative partnerships between university teacher education departments and public schools. In addition, creating instructional priorities and research agendas that assist all participants in the partnership means working through environmental and communication tensions in order to reap benefits for all participants, as theory and practice are integrated framework (Goodlad, 1991).

Naturally, Carolyn approached her new assignment with a bit of apprehension. How would she lay the foundation for a future of positive working relationships in this elementary school? How would she fit into the school's culture? How would she open lines of positive communication and make herself available to these teachers? How would her research interest fit into the busy elementary school schedule?

The school and the university had been working with pre-service teachers and supervisors successfully for five years. The site coordinator was actively involved in decisions about intern placements within the building.

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The school staff were friendly to university faculty. Because of this PDS partnership, Carolyn was welcomed into the school building. Next she had to create her place within that community.

Carolyn began her Professor-in-Residence tenure by visiting the school and meeting the principal and vice principal before the school year began. By conversing with the administrators, she learned what they valued in their school. The school motto, "One School, One Community," reflected their collaborative and inclusive practices. When the school year started, she spent a day each week in the building visiting her pre-service interns and meeting staff. She spent her lunchtime socializing with the staff sharing both personal and professional stories and expertise. The more she talked with the staff and became active in the school, the more she understood the culture and mission of these educators. All the staff had high expectations for student success and worked at supporting student learning. As her relationships grew, she met the English language learner (ELL) teacher—Megan—and discovered that they had a mutual interest in the teaching of writing. They decided that a collaborative research project might strengthen the relationship between the two educators and potentially provide new insights into how to motivate ELLs to learn to write English.

This decision was clearly the result of the solid foundation of the PDS partnership already in place. The school already had a positive relationship with the university, and Megan was therefore comfortable and willing to try new practices and embark on an inquiry that would meet diverse student needs, which is one of the goals of a PDS framework (Holmes Group, 1995). The PDS site offered a reasonable context in which this joint research project could occur.

In Maryland, the relationship between a PDS and its university partner is a collaborative one framework (Higgins & Merickel, 1997; Teitel, 2003). Through these coopera-

tive relationships the PDS principle of connecting theory and practice for the betterment of all parties can be enacted framework (Holmes Group, 1995). Relying on this orientation and history, Megan and Carolyn met to discuss their goals for the students and the intersections of their literacy interests. One of Megan's goals for her fifth grade ELL class was to improve their literacy skills by using process writing and the 6+1 Trait Writing framework (Culham, 2003; Heskett, 2001), which was the curriculum used in the school. She wanted to concentrate on the writing qualities of "voice," "ideas," and "organization" from the 6+1 Trait Writing approach, rather than on "conventions." Grammar conventions are difficult for ELLs to master, and Megan felt this skill was secondary to the writing process. She wanted these students to formulate good ideas in a non-threatening environment. Sentence formation and grammar could be edited later.

One of Carolyn's research goals was to validate students' identities via cultural narratives. Megan believed that allowing students to hear rich stories orally and then asking them to write a piece that paralleled the story would break down the walls that previously hindered students' creativity in writing. These educators common goals of using oral stories and writing to support literacy learning developed in the early weeks as they planned the project and began working together in the classroom. They eventually settled on the following research question to guide their project: "Does the use of storytelling motivate English language learners to engage in literacy practices more, or in a better way, and if so, how?"

This article describes how collaborative research worked in this PDS setting—highlighting its rewards and challenges—as well as the story of one English language student and how the use of cultural stories motivated her to gain confidence and skills in writing. We hope that this account of our research and teaching experiences will encourage others to engage in

collaborative research and possibly use cultural storytelling to motivate their students.

Literature Review

As a storyteller, Carolyn was excited to share her love of story with Megan's students and to see how storytelling could positively affect their literacy development, especially in writing. Through storytelling, these educators believed they could support various students' cultures in the classroom and motivate the students to become more engaged in using and learning verbal and written language skills.

As a part of Megan's writing lessons, Carolyn would tell a cultural tale related to one of the student's home cultures. The discussion of this story would then act as a prompt for writing using the 6+1 Trait Writing criteria framework (Culham, 2003; Heskett, 2001). To begin to help answer their research question, Carolyn's storytelling and the ensuing group discussions were recorded and transcribed. The writing artifacts collected included a story for which the students were free to choose the topic, three stories from writing prompts, and a story about going to middle school. Each student completed a pre- and post-interest survey on writing framework (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000) and was interviewed and recorded at the end of the year. Those data were collected over eight months. It must be mentioned that we did obtain formal approval to collect these data and conduct this research project from the university, the school, and each student's parent/guardian.

Content analysis was used to find themes in the transcribed group discussions, the writing pieces, the surveys, and the transcribed individual interviews. As suggested by Creswell framework (1998), the researcher read all data to gain an overall sense of the information present. Then codes or categories were developed from the data framework (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In addition data were counted to gain frequency information

framework (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The research story unfolded as the data were compared and contrasted. As the data categories were studied, important themes began to emerge. These themes became the basis of the findings of this qualitative research project.

Before beginning, the literature on storytelling was reviewed to ground our instructional practices and to focus our study. Storytelling is an oral rendition of a cultural tradition, a literary tale, or a personal experience framework (Peck, 1989), told in the narrator's own words framework (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). The teller and the listeners form a connection through the interactive process of storytelling. Storytelling begins with engaging oral and auditory skills but then continues by involving critical thinking, comprehension, and even writing skills framework (Craig, Hull, Haggart, & Crowder, 2001; Peck, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Telling a story is a basic literacy activity that can set the stage for the strengthening of other literacy skills.

Storytelling has a connection with individual narratives. Every person's narrative or personal story begins at home with family and cultural traditions. As Heath's framework (1983) seminal work highlights, each home culture values literacy in a different way. Heath examined how three families of different cultures taught literacy behaviors in their homes. Although home literacies often do not align with school literacies, they need to be valued in order to build a strong foundation for school literacy skills framework (Street, 1995; Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004). Students' lives can be validated and a platform created for improving literacy learning by relating to students' home cultures with storytelling framework (Speaker, Taylor, & Kamen, 2004) and reading aloud framework (Meier, 2003; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009; Roberts, 2008).

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reading. The scholarship of Cho and Choi framework (2008) revealed how storytelling and reading aloud improves students' motivation and interest in reading. Other research shows that teachers can use stories to activate students' prior knowledge and build bridges to the home culture framework (Bauer, 2009; Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004). Through surveys and interviews, Sturtevant and Kim framework (2010) demonstrated that middle school English language learners' valuing of reading was affected by their language ability and self-concept.

Motivating students to utilize their literacy skills within the classroom requires the creation of a welcoming community. In this way, the classroom becomes a supportive environment that encourages participation. Storytelling and the resultant discussion between the teacher and students and among the students themselves are valuable for creating a community of learners. This building of community can also assist students new to English in gaining a more positive sense of their identities as English speakers. Students have the opportunity during the discussion to relate their own experiences to the story and to the narratives of the others in the group framework (Haneda, 2008; Martínez-Roldán, 2003). This building of community is essential to motivating students in school and with these literacy practices. The research literature also reveals the value of connecting school to home cultures via storytelling and reading aloud in order to motivate and support literacy learning for ELLs.

School and Participants

The urban elementary school in Maryland where this study took place enrolled about 450 students from preschool to fifth grade. It was a Title I school where the demographics of the school included 37% of the students who had limited English proficiency and 12% who were special education students. The student body was comprised of 7% Asian, 22% Caucasian, 28% African-American, and

43% Hispanic students. The school was located in a diverse neighborhood where most of the students walked to school.

Megan, the ELL teacher working with the fifth grade English language learners, is a bilingual certified elementary teacher with a master's degree in Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). At the time of this study, she had taught at this school for 13 years. Typically, she worked with this group of students for 40 minutes each day. Usually, she met in a general education classroom; however, on the days that Carolyn visited, they met in the library so that they would not disturb other students. As the ELL support teacher, Megan supplemented the general classroom instruction with lessons on writing, reading, and language skills. The students utilized various computer programs to practice their language skills at their individual levels. The goal for these students was to gain English mastery as quickly as possible.

As introduced above, during the 2009–2010 school year, Carolyn and Megan integrated cultural storytelling into the literacy curriculum. The stories were chosen based on the cultures represented in the group (e.g., Bolivian, Mexican, and Bangla). Carolyn met with the group weekly for 40 minutes for eleven sessions—six in the fall semester and five in the spring semester.

The fifth graders consisted of six students (two girls and four boys) who had qualified for English language instruction based on the results from "LAS Links," a language assessment system, which tests their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Of the six students who were consistently enrolled, only four met the research protocol of Carolyn's university, which allowed them to be included in this study. All four of these students were born outside the United States. The four student participants included the following children (all names are pseudonyms): Carlota, a girl from Bolivia, who had attended this school for five years; Antonio, a boy from Mexico, who had attended for six

years; Alejandro, a boy from Mexico, who had attended for one year; and Raeda, a girl from Bangladesh, who had just arrived in the United States.

Of these four students, Raeda began the year with the least knowledge of English, although she had literacy skills in her home languages of Bangla and Hindi. Because Raeda showed the most marked improvement in her English speaking and writing skills during the year and participated in every instruction session described in the next section, we think her story is most illustrative of the potential impact of such a collaborative, PDS-based teaching/research project and we focus in this article on her experience.

Method

As mentioned previously, Carolyn incorporated the telling of a cultural tale into the typical instruction session facilitated by Megan. In general, Carolyn chose stories based on the goal of matching their origin with that of one of the ELLs in the class. Over the course of the academic year, she introduced seven tales to the students.

The first tale that Carolyn told was a Seneca American Indian legend called "Where All Stories Come From" framework (Hamilton & Weiss, 1999). She began with this story because she wanted the students to understand storytelling format and the origin of stories. Throughout the year, she told or read the following stories: *The Drum: A Folktale from India* framework (Cleveland, 2006), *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale* framework (Deedy, 2007), *Too Many Tamales* framework (Soto, 1993), "The Silver Miners: A Legend from Bolivia" framework (McCaughrean, 1997), "Why the Sea is Salt" (1859) framework, and *Possum Magic* framework (Fox, 1990).

With each tale that she told or read, Carolyn previewed the important vocabulary and pointed out the story's country of origin on a world map. After each storytelling, she

conducted a five to ten minute group discussion about the story. The students' responses included clarification of language use, comprehension of the story facts, and a discussion of possible story meanings. During these discussions the students asked questions, made connections, and retold the story.

On her second visit, the students read the story orally with a partner and then discussed the story along with the writing prompt (e.g., write a story from a character's perspective, use the story model to create a story). Carolyn and Megan would brainstorm with the students a list of ideas for writing. A graphic organizer (i.e., a chart) was used to help the students record the information needed to write their stories. Throughout the rest of each week, the students would then work on their writing (i.e., complete the graphic organizer, write a draft, confer with a teacher, and rewrite). Megan conducted shared writing experiences as needed to support the students in the writing process. For some assignments, students completed the whole writing process through to publication, while other prompts resulted only in drafts.

The cooperative nature of such jointly-conducted teaching and research became apparent early on. Teaching the students in this manner was a collaborative experience that relied on constant communication and reflective evaluation on student learning. Carolyn would email Megan her lesson ideas before the storytelling; after the lesson they would debrief, discussing how the instruction had gone and what the next steps would be, based on the students' responses to the activities implemented and their understanding thus far.

Although Carolyn's main role was to be storyteller and discussion leader in the class, she interacted with the students in other ways. Sometimes she assisted the students in their writing by conferring during their writing workshop. Once she was their substitute teacher when Megan was absent. In addition, she worked in the general education class

rooms of some of the students while observing their student teachers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Various types of data were collected over the year related to the entire project but focused on Raeda's efforts (see Table 1). These included five writing samples. In the fall, students wrote on a topic of their choice. Three other student writing samples were written in conjunction with the storytelling or read alouds. For example, they wrote a "magic cause and effect" story based on the format of *The Drum* framework (Cleveland, 2006) and a first person narrative based on *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* framework (Deedy, 2007). In the spring, students wrote essays about going to middle school. These writing samples were read and coded for story structure (i.e., beginning, middle, and ending), sentence structure (i.e., simple and complex sentences), and themes (e.g., family, friends, etc.). In the end, the sentence structure information became the most pertinent data.

The Writing Attitude Survey created by Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio framework (2000) was used to measure the

students' attitudes toward writing. We administered the 28-item survey twice—first in October and then in May. The students rated their feelings about writing on a Likert scale where positive to negative attitudes were represented by four different images of the cartoon character Garfield. The data gathered did not indicate causes of writing attitude, but were used to note attitudinal patterns.

In order to glean more information from the Writing Attitude Survey, the question types were coded. Carolyn and Megan wanted to determine if students' attitudes related to writing—in school, at home, or in both areas—changed between October and May. They labeled each question as belonging to a "personal" or "public" domain. Personal questions dealt with private writing experiences such as writing at home or for personal reasons (e.g., diaries, stories, poetry, fun, or life experience stories). Public questions dealt with school writing experiences (e.g., writing in other disciplines, writing assignments, and writing careers).

The oral recorded data from story discussions and individual interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes and patterns framework (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2001). During the interviews, the students were

Table 1 Data Collected from Raeda

Writing attitude survey	Pre-assessment	October 2009
	Post-Assessment	May 2010
Storytelling & discussion	Field Notes	
	"Where All Stories Come From" (A tale from the Seneca)	October 2009
	<i>The Drum: A Folktale from India</i>	November 2009
	<i>Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale</i>	November 2009
	<i>Too Many Tamales</i>	December 2009
	<i>Possum Magic</i>	May 2010
	Audio Tapes & Transcriptions	
	"The Silver Miners. A Legend from Bolivia"	January 2010
	"Why the Sea is Salt" (A tale from Norway)	February 2010
	Personal story "My life"	November 2009
Writing samples	Magic story (prompt from <i>The Drum</i>) "Magic story"	November 2009
	First person narrative (prompt from <i>Martina the Beautiful Cockroach</i>) "Mana the Giraffe"	December 2009
	Story about a terrible day "My bad day and happy day"	February 2010
	What are your feelings about middle school? "Going to middle school"	May 2010
	Interview	
	Audio tapes & transcriptions of questions and answers (See Appendix A for interview questions)	May 2010

asked how they perceived their speaking and writing in English. They referred to one of their stories to show how their writing had improved.

In total, the data consisted of five writing samples, three recorded interviews, two recorded group discussions, and two writing attitude surveys from each student. These data were compared to note where patterns were similar and how the writings, discussion behaviors, and writing survey complemented or conflicted with each other. As noted above, we found Raeda's experience to be most illustrative of the positive outcomes of this effort, so we concentrate on findings related to her efforts below. Our analyses of these data revealed the story of Raeda's literacy growth throughout the year.

Raeda's Story

Raeda arrived in the United States from Bangladesh in the fall of 2009 and enrolled in Megan's ELL class in October. With limited English speaking skills, she remained fairly quiet during the discussions which ensued after each storytelling event. She also had a difficult time responding independently to the writing prompts in English, and much of her writing during the first half of the year was completed with Megan's assistance. When Raeda arrived, she was definitely in the "silent" period of language acquisition framework (Krashen, 2002).

Raeda's Growth in Oral Language

As expected, when Raeda joined the class, she had a difficult time conversing with the other students. In the months during which Carolyn and Megan worked with her, they saw her become more involved. In the beginning of the school year, when engaging in conversation, Raeda was usually more communicative in private situations. For example, when Carolyn picked her up for ELL class, she would ask Raeda about her day. At first, Raeda would just smile, nod her head, and say a single word. However, in February, she told Carolyn about

playing in the snow the previous week when school had been closed.

In early November following the storytelling of *The Drum* framework (Cleveland, 2006), Carolyn used vocabulary cards to retell the sequence of the story. *The Drum* is a folktale from India, in which the main character received his wish after a series of interactions helping others. Students chose a card with a picture of an event from the story and summarized the event in the retelling of the story. Carolyn gave Raeda the "coat card" because she thought it would be easy for Raeda to explain (i.e., "The man was cold so I gave him a coat"). However, she was unable to think of the words to explain the event without the help of her classmates.

In contrast, by the end of May, during the last brainstorming session regarding how the students felt about going to middle school, Raeda often had her hand in the air and added many comments to the discussion. She talked about having a locker, riding a bus, and new teachers. She made many comments and had questions about middle school. Megan and Carolyn were pleased with the progress that Raeda had made in her oral English language over the year.

Although Carolyn led the class discussion during the storytelling experiences, Megan's supportive role was essential. With her knowledge of the students' abilities and of the second language acquisition process, she was able to ask clarifying questions or make connections to other class lessons. For example, while Carolyn led a discussion on vocabulary words for a story, Megan reminded the students of similar words they had learned the day before. Explicitly helping students make connections is essential for supporting literacy growth for ELLs.

During her final interview, Raeda said her oral English had improved "because Miss Taylor [Megan] and you [Carolyn] teach me some English and when I talk to my friend." When asked why she currently talks more in class, she responded "because I know English now and when sometimes I need help so I talk to my friends." The storytelling sessions provided time for students to talk about the story and themselves. These sessions provided an inviting

classroom community which contributed to Raeda gaining confidence in her language use and proficiency and motivating her to participate in class discussions.

Raeda's Growth in Writing

Raeda's confidence and writing skills also improved over the year. Her first writing in October was a free-write that she completed independently entitled "My Life." It consisted of a list of 21 simple sentences with almost half of them beginning with "I like..." She wrote about her family, school, and friends in a simple sentence structure of subject, verb, and object. For example, she wrote "...I like my friend. I like read a book and draw... I like play game. I like mom and dad. I like basketball. My favorite color is purple... I like Bangladesh..." Her conventions (i.e., spelling and grammar) were mostly correct. This assignment was the only time in the first half of the year that Raeda wrote independently. Raeda had been reluctant to do any writing without support from Megan; therefore, all of her early stories were shared writings.

At this juncture, a collaborative conversation was essential for Megan and Carolyn in order to move Raeda toward more independent writing. Carolyn was interested in Raeda's ability to organize a story on her own. Had her writing moved from short declarative sentences to a more complex story structure? Megan was curious to see if Raeda had grown more self-confident in her writing abilities. Could she write independently? They decided to allow Raeda to write in her first language. The text could be translated via services offered by the county. In this way, she could display her ability to construct a story independently. Yet, when given this opportunity, Raeda chose to write in English, thus marking the beginning of her move toward independence in writing.

In February, Raeda was ready to complete a writing assignment independently. The prompt was to write about a terrible day that each student had experienced. Earlier in the week Megan had brainstormed with students possible ideas for their stories. During the writing workshop, Megan and Carolyn roamed the

room assisting and interacting with students as they wrote independently.

Raeda's story was entitled "My Bad Day and Happy Day." It was about how her mother did not allow her outside to play in the snow. Then her mother changed her mind and let her play in the snow, which made Raeda happy. Her story consisted of 22 sentences. The story structure was more complex as it included sentences with dependent clauses (27%), sentences with time words (23%), and sentences with dialogue (23%). For example, Raeda wrote, "My bad day only saturday because my mom don't let me play with snow. My mom think I am sich and cold but I don't... I am so sad because I saw window. than everybody play with snow. My mom think thats good for me. I know mom but I like snow My mom said, you playing with snow tomorrow. Thank you mom. You are a great mom..." Compared to her first independent writing sample, this piece was about the same length yet the sentence structures were more complex. In addition, it told a story with a beginning, middle, and ending, not just a list of facts, as her first writing piece had.

Raeda's last writing sample on middle school was also completed independently. After a class brainstorming session, she wrote seventeen sentences that told the pros and cons of going to middle school the next year for sixth grade. She used complex sentence structure (36%) and simple sentence structure (29%). She wrote about what she imagined things would be like in middle school and how it would affect her. For example, "I feel bad and good. My good think is everybody get a locker and learning about new things. My bad think is when I forget my locker number and my classroom... When I go to middle school I miss my teacher and this school. I never forgot I learn so much in this school. I don't go middle school. I love — Elementary school..." Although her use of correct English grammar was not flawless, she had written in an organized manner about ideas that were clearly related to her topic.

When comparing Raeda's writing throughout the year, Carolyn and Megan noticed that she had advanced in her confidence and ability to write in English. At the beginning of the year,

she was more concerned with grammar and spelling rather than with telling a story. She wrote in her comfort zone of simple sentences on topics about which she was knowledgeable. By the end of the year, she was sharing her personal story, utilizing more complex sentence structures and dialogue. In her interview she said "I write ... more writing English... everything is English so I practice... I like writing because it helps me remember something." Throughout the year, she had heard many stories with dialogue and had practiced writing stories with dialogue. Through the art of storytelling, Raeda was motivated to model the stories she heard. As her writing ability changed, so did her attitude toward writing.

Raeda's Attitude Toward Writing

Raeda showed a tremendous attitude improvement toward writing in English over the year. Her score on the Writing Attitude Survey (Kear et al., 2000) improved from the 24th percentile in the first survey to the 92nd percentile in the final survey. Her attitude score on fourteen public domain questions as well as in three personal domain questions increased, while her attitude score decreased in only one personal and one public domain.

During the year Raeda learned about reading and writing in English and what school was like in the United States. We believe this knowledge affected her attitude as she learned to write in science, social studies, and language arts. In each of these areas, Raeda's attitude became more positive. The results of this survey aligned with Raeda's increased willingness to write independently as well as to engage more readily in oral discussions. When asked if her attitude toward writing had changed over the year, Raeda responded, "First I sometimes something messed up now not really." As she talked, she looked at one of her writing pieces to show where her words made sense and were neatly written.

Final Comments about Raeda

As a new student to the United States, Raeda arrived in October with literacy skills in her

native language and some basic skills in English. As any neophyte likely would be, she was shy and hesitant to engage in activities in English. She watched, listened, and relied on help from the teacher and her classmates to accomplish her educational tasks. This behavior was most evident in her writing. She listened to the stories shared in class and followed the directions for completing graphic organizers but relied on the constant support of Megan to finish any writing assignment. During discussion times, she listened and waited for her classmates to help her answer questions.

By February, she was beginning to write independently and by May, she was actively involved in class discussions. Her actions were supported by her responses on the writing attitude survey that showed a marked increase in positive feelings toward writing activities. We believe Raeda's story is one of success if judged by her attitude change toward writing and her participation in school discussions. It appears that the use of cultural storytelling played a positive role in this development by helping to create a community of students who could share stories from their cultures and related to their personal experiences. Storytelling in this classroom seemed to help motivate Raeda to talk and write about herself in a more positive way, while improving her literacy skills and her writing attitude.

Discussion

In returning to the question of this research—"Does the use of storytelling motivate English language learners to engage in literacy practices more or in a better way, and if so, how?"—we believe the data we have gathered tell a story of Raeda's successful literacy development. Of course, Raeda's many other educational experiences encountered throughout the year (e.g., Megan's ELL instruction, the efforts of her classroom teacher, her art and music teachers) also likely influenced the positive growth of her literacy skills.

In fact, there are too many teachable moments in school to isolate any one or two

contexts that definitively assisted Raeda's growth in her literacy skills. The focus on the use of storytelling, however, seemed to be a part of her successful literacy engagement in school. Based on the evidence of her final interview, it was clear that she enjoyed the stories. Many times during class discussions, students referred to *The Drum* framework (Cleveland, 2006) as "Raeda's story" because it was from India, which students perceived as very similar to her Bangla culture. Storytelling was used to motivate Raeda's literacy engagement as well as to validate her cultural identity.

Throughout the year, Raeda gained confidence in her oral language and her ability to participate in school via discussions and writing. It seems that through storytelling, Raeda's culture was validated when Carolyn told *The Drum* framework (Cleveland, 2006) story. With the help of Megan, Raeda wrote her own magic story based on this folktale. As she explained in her final interview, this story was her favorite "because the Indian design is good and the boy like the drum to play with and I like the [Nintendo]." When Raeda began to write independently, her stories revealed her ability to use more complex sentence structures.

The data gathered support our finding that Raeda gained confidence and skills in her oral and written English. Her perception of her writing interest and ability increased. She became more confident and willing to participate in class discussions. Raeda said "writing stories. . . .are fun to write" She shared that she gets her writing ideas from the stories that she hears and reads. "When I like it [story heard], I copy it." These changes seem to be motivated by the positive storytelling experiences and the atmosphere that storytelling creates.

After reflecting on these data and the time spent with the students in this ELL class, it seems that using storytelling as a motivation to write was effective at engaging them with and thus improving their literacy skills. Raeda, for example, enjoyed the stories we shared and

they helped to motivate her to engage with the class writing assignments, first as shared writing experiences and eventually independently. Storytelling became a tool for motivating and engaging this student.

Through storytelling, Raeda's culture was recognized framework (Bauer, 2009; Sumaryono & Ortiz, 2004) which could have assisted in her improvement of her attitude and writing. Existing research literature suggests that through storytelling and reading aloud, students gain self-esteem, motivation to learn framework (Cho & Choi, 2008), improved language development framework (Speaker et al., 2004), and increased vocabulary and comprehension framework (Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009). Our data did not reveal Raeda's growth in all of these areas. Sturtevant and Kim's framework (2010) study demonstrated that students with lower language ability can be more highly motivated to participate in literacy activities in school. Their study focused on students' self-concepts and the value of reading, rather than writing. Our study adds to the body of knowledge concerning writing, storytelling, and motivation among ELLs.

Telling or reading a story also provides a model of language that students can observe and use for their own purposes later. Oral language acquisition is the first goal of English language learners. Through listening and discussing, students learn and practice language. By connecting the stories to writing prompts, English learners can practice another form of literacy. As the students gain confidence, they can tell stories that are based on their lives, whether the events shared are real or imagined. Through storytelling, students also learn story grammar that is important in comprehension as well as in writing.

This research endeavor was successful for two reasons—collaboration and communication. First, we—Carolyn and Megan—worked to identify common goals for the students and the study. We talked about our individual objectives and how we could collaborate to

achieve a common objective. In this case, Carolyn integrated the telling of cultural tales into the writing curriculum that Megan used in the classroom. Next, we worked to keep communications open. Email notes were the most common form of these exchanges. During the class sessions, we collaborated by supporting each other in class discussions and interactions with the students. Additionally, we set aside times to discuss and reflect after the lessons we co-taught. Our collaboration and communication were critical for planning and reflecting on these instructional activities.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

This qualitative study was just the beginning of establishing connections between storytelling, writing, and motivation. In our review of the research literature, we found no studies documenting the connections between storytelling, writing, and motivation. Through this report we hope to share the stories of students like Raeda to offer more evidence regarding the potential benefits of using storytelling and reading aloud with writing assignments for ELLs. It became evident throughout the year in the resultant discussion of each of the tales that Carolyn introduced that specific students identified more with certain stories than did other students. Ultimately, the use of cultural storytelling can be a foundational bridge for English learners as they develop their English literacy skills.

We believe that this study also has implications for the future of PDSs. Clark (1999) identifies four purposes of PDSs and we believe we addressed all of these through this collaborative research. First, a PDS trains pre-service teachers. Although the interns in our building were not involved with the ELL classroom where the research was conducted, each classroom included ELLs. As the professor for these pre-service teachers, Carolyn used her teaching/research experiences with this project as the subjects of discussion with these interns.

Second, a PDS promotes inquiry. We conducted this study as a reaction to a need in our school setting. We believe this inquiry process was a model for both in-service and pre-service teachers on the role of inquiry in reflective teaching. Third, a PDS provides professional development for all involved. We now see our project as resulting in a two-way informal professional development as we both shared and grew in our knowledge and skills regarding working with ELLs.

Finally, a PDS encourages school renewal. We cannot say with certainty that we accomplished this goal. We can only hope that the results gathered and shared here will inform others' future work with ELLs in this school. Because this research occurred in a PDS, which is part of a larger school and university network, we are hopeful that the results of our study will positively affect more entities than only the members of our research team.

One limitation of this study was the challenge of working within the structure of the school system. The public school schedule is often changing, due to testing, special programs, or even the weather. Aligning a university schedule with the public school schedule was frequently difficult. Finding uninterrupted times for teaching and gathering data was a challenge. In addition, the mobility of this diverse population of students made collecting consistent data difficult. Even with these challenges, data were collected, and we were able to tell the literacy story of one student within a small group of ELLs.

It was not our intention to discover causal relationships amongst the phenomena we were studying, nor do the qualitative research techniques employed allow for such claims. Storytelling was a new approach to learning in this ELL classroom; however, there were many teaching strategies used with these students throughout their school days. The positive attitude changes as well as the increase in literacy skills can also be attributed in part to the many academic interventions to which

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these students were exposed. More studies need to be conducted to gather additional data on how storytelling and reading aloud impact English language learners and their writing development. Future research might inquire about how storytelling might be used for other writing genres such as informative and argumentative writing and about the role of storytelling in helping students learn to speak, read, and write a second language.

Finally, this research endeavor is also the story of how an ELL teacher in a PDS collaborated with a university professor to assist English language learners to develop their literacy skills. The success of PDS partnerships lies in building relationships amongst constituents and working at collaboration so that all parties realize success. Although this study represents a success story of collaborative research in a PDS, many challenges remain to such endeavors. We hope that our experience will motivate others to build relationships conducive to collaborative research amid challenging times. ■

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. This school year I have told you stories and helped you in writing. What has been your favorite part of this activity during ELL class? Why?
2. This school year do you think you have improved in your speaking of English? Why do you feel this way?
3. This school year do you think you have improved in your writing? Why do you feel this way?
4. Here are some of the stories you have written this year. Choose one and tell me about it. Why you wrote it? Why it is your favorite?
5. Has your attitude or feelings toward writing changed this year? If so, how? Why?
6. Do you have any questions for me?

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