

I. Context:

The focus of my report is a kindergarten class of seven students, all age 6 at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Five of the students began studying English as part of our school's preschool program. The other students entered our kindergarten program with no prior English experience. Students spend approximately 90% of their school time in an English immersion environment (across 22.5 hours of schooltime, only about 2 of those hours are dedicated to Japanese language learning). Students engage with a variety of texts throughout the year, including monthly storybooks, grammar worksheets, and sightword worksheet exercises.

In terms of level, all students have developed some form of basic interpersonal communication skill in English, i.e. students mainly use English during school hours when contextually appropriate, they play with each other in English during free-time, and have some literacy ability in English. By the end of March 2021, most of the students have passed some level of standardized testing above their "Japanese grade level": two students received a passing score on the level 5 Eiken (a test which is "mainly aimed at first-year Japanese junior high school students" according to the www.eiken.or.jp website), while four other students received passing scores on the level 4 Eiken (which is aimed at second-year Japanese junior high school students according to the same website). The seventh student in this class has not taken any standardized tests.

The main problem I encountered going into this semester was that some of my students had difficulties engaging with reading and writing activities. While the two strongest students in the class were very naturally eager to read and write, the remaining students would either have difficulties in writing productively, reading independently, or in some cases both. This also led some issues with less-competent students showing decreased motivation to read or write on their own. To address these issues, I explored the use of collaborative storytelling activities as a tool to engage students with more peer-mediated reading and writing strategies. My hope was that I could create zones of proximal development in which weaker readers and writers in my class would be able to improve their literacy and storytelling abilities collaboratively under the guidance of their teacher and more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

II. Goals and Objectives

- 1) Use collaborative storytelling as an activity to help engage students with reading and writing.**
- 2) Explore peer-mediated techniques in the context of storytelling-based activities to engage weaker students' zones of proximal development with more capable peers.**

III. Literature Review:

This literature review focuses on providing background information on four areas that I believe are most relevant to my research. The first section covers the principles of sociocultural theory, especially with regards to a Vygotskian approach towards understanding child development. The second section tries to explain some current viewpoints on young learner literacy in EFL contexts. The third section introduces approaches to peer-to-peer strategies relevant to the young learner context.

(1) Sociocultural Theory

The sociocultural theory (henceforth “SCT”) seems to be a fixture in SLA literature, especially with concepts like the zone of proximal development (henceforth “ZPD”) and scaffolding (i.e. that a learner can be brought from their current level to a higher level of performance with the aid of an interlocutor) being very useful pedagogical concepts of how humans develop cognitively via social interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 118). The ZPD is especially popular for its easy-to-understand depiction via three concentric circles: an inner circle which might be labeled as what a person is able to do, the next circle indicating what a person can do with help, and the final outer circle indicating what the subject cannot do at all. Vygotsky himself describes this as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) However, Swain et al. (2010) warn that the frequent use of the concepts of SLA also unfortunately leads to their frequent misuse from a strictly Vygotskian perspective, especially when Vygotsky’s theory of mind is not taken into account. Such potential misuses might be avoided when one understands concepts like the ZPD from his original context in exploring child development. A great example of Vygotsky’s theory of mind is evident in his criticisms of Jean Piaget’s developmental theories. In his essay “Piaget’s Theory of the Child’s Speech and Thought”, Vygotsky firmly orders development as first social, then egocentric, then internal (which he called “inner” or “private speech”, depending on the translation you are reading); this is in contrast to the Piagetian sequence moving from non-verbal autistic thought to “egocentric thought”, then finally to socialized speech and logical thinking (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 37). Thus, according to Vygotskian SCT, features of cognition are not just an array of innate abilities growing into a mature state with the social environment merely a stage, but rather is driven first and foremost by forces present in one’s external social environment. (Poehner, p. 1)

With one’s social environment being the key driver in cognitive development, SCT places emphasis on how our interaction with our environment leads to individual growth. A ZPD can potentially be created with the assistance of any force present in one’s social/cultural environment; often this “expert” is a teacher or a person with more knowledge helping the learner along, but inanimate cultural objects can fill this role as well (Swain et al 2010). This feature of SCT makes perfect sense when you consider SCT’s intellectual origins in Marxist dialectical materialism (Overton 2006, p. 31). But, rather than focusing on macroeconomic forces as Marx did, Vygotsky instead focused his lens on the development of children, and in particular how a child’s development is significantly reflected in their degree of mastery in the use of tools: a relationship that becomes transformed (in comparison to their primitive preverbal period) when speech and practical activity converge to help transform a developing child’s mind into a uniquely human-form of abstract and practical intelligence (Vygotsky 1978, p.21-24). One important tool in Vygotsky’s estimation for this is play, and in particular imaginative play, as imagination represents a new psychological process for children that is uniquely human, allowing them to realize desires that are normally unrealizable. (Vygotsky 1978, p.93). The use of play in children leads to another important cultural tool, writing, since many of the features of imaginative and make-believe represent a kind of “first-order symbolism” for children, which eventually helps contribute to “second-order symbolism” systems such as writing. (Vygotsky 1978, p.110). Thus, from a Vygotskian SCT perspective, imagination and play are fundamental tools in the development of children’s higher cognitive functions.

Some SCT researchers building upon Vygotsky's work take the emphasis on tools further by trying to classify abstract cognitive functions into subsets of "mental tools". Arshad & Chen cite John-Steiner and Mahn's prescription of the term "psychological tools" to these functions (Arshad & Chen, 2009), while educational philosopher Kieran Egan categorizes an array of mental-reasoning abilities as "cognitive tools" (Egan, 2005). While it's as yet hard to say where these attempts at mental taxonomy stand in relation to "mainstream" views of SCT research, the author of this paper believes that these approaches hold promise for SCT-inspired young learners pedagogy in their attempt to help teachers explore heuristics that help students develop not only their academic skills sets, but their emotional and psychological well-being as well.

(2) Young Learners Literacy

Literacy is not naturally acquired, with children typically learning to read and write in their first language (L1) in school during early childhood. Generally, literacy instruction with young learners (henceforth "YLS") should include three main cueing systems to create meaning from print: **graphophonic cues**, i.e. acquiring meaning via decoding; **semantic cues**, i.e. acquiring meaning via background knowledge; and **syntactic cues**, i.e. acquiring meaning from text using knowledge of language patterns and grammar (Shin & Crandall 2019, p. 188). Utilizing a variety of approaches towards text, most modern researchers and practitioners in first, second, and foreign language literacy promote "balanced literacy" approaches which integrate elements from both whole language/"top-down" processing skills (e.g. semantic and syntactic cues) with phonic-based/"bottom-up" processing skills, e.g. graphophonic cues (Shin & Crandall, 2019).

The benefits of literacy, especially reading, in language acquisition is largely assumed. Lightbown & Spada (2013, p.63) cite Stephen Krashen's assertion that the best source of vocabulary growth is reading for pleasure, and Lightbown herself, along with Kojic-Sabo, found evidence supporting the benefits of reading without focused instruction provided that the effort is supported by good learning strategies such as a note taking, looking up words, and review (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, researchers have also found evidence of the benefits of oral storytelling in the improvement of literacy, leading to enhancements in fluency, vocabulary acquisition, writing, and recall (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). There are additional benefits of oral storytelling to be argued for with regards to improving YL literacy. Historically, most cultures have a long heritage of folk literature originally based in oracy, and the actual act of storytelling allows a teacher-storyteller to mold a story using standard story patterns, formulaic language (e.g. "Once upon a time, "deep dark woods", etc.), stock character archetypes, and so on, in order to shape the story to the needs of its listeners (Bland, 273). For these reasons, the flexibility of oral storytelling has great potential as a literacy-oriented pedagogical tool in YL classrooms.

(3) Peer-mediated learning

"Peer-mediated learning" refers to an instructional approach emphasizing student-student interaction and is an alternative to teacher-centered or individualistic learning approaches, with three main variations of this approach being cooperative, collaborative, and peer tutoring. Cooperative learning methods are usually characterized by their emphasis on structured groups and well-defined roles, while collaborative learning methods tends to make task completion its central objective with students being given agency to divide labor, develop power and authority relations, and navigate task demands (Cole, 2014). Cole (2014) also notes that peer-mediated learning has

theoretical underpinnings based in SCT, with Vygotskian constructs such as scaffolding and mediation providing the framework for research on peer-mediated learning.

Peer-mediated learning in a Vygotskian SCT context has interesting research implications for assessment practices, in which “formative” or “dynamic” assessment becomes an approach where instruction and assessment are executed as a unified activity. This approach would be in contrast to “summative” or “static” assessment approaches, where past achievements of individuals alone (e.g. tests, quizzes, etc.) qualify decisions about future states, which is approach that dominates most modern educational institutions (Poehner, 2008).

IV. What I did:

I implemented “collaborative storytelling” activities with my class of seven K3 (5 to 6 year old) students. In this report **“collaborative storytelling” is defined as an oracy-based activity where participants work together to develop a shared narrative, typically using some form of mental imagery and material props, visual aids, and/or realia for additional narrative support. The goal of such activities would be to create a ZPD in which students increase their competency in using their imaginations for story-telling and story-writing in English.** In addition, I wanted to find ways to increase peer interaction in these activities. Three main types of activities were implemented:

- **“table-top” style roleplaying game (henceforth “TTRPG”):** narrator-mediated adventure genre storytelling played at a table, ala “Dungeons & Dragons”. Within our class, this activity is usually called “The Dungeon Game”, and rules implementation is largely improvised. Stories are typically in the style of an adventure-oriented genre/theme. Initially, these games were played with the teacher as the sole narrator of game events and students as players. However, subsequent iterations of this game had all students sharing the narrator role with a timed rotation, allowing more peer-to-peer interaction as a student-player described their character’s actions in the shared imagination play-space, and the student-narrator facilitating resolution of said actions (with the teacher offering clarifications and suggestions when student-narrators seemed to need help)
- **simulation role-play:** event simulation with role assignments. Specifically, we did a situational role-play where students pretended to be participants in a TV-style music talent competition.
- **story dice:** six-sided dice with various images to help facilitate story telling ideas. In my implementation although “real life” story dice exist, I opted to use a free iPad story dice app for my activities.

As a general structure, I usually tried to pair each collaborative storytelling activity with a subsequent collaborative story-writing activity; however, this didn’t always pan out due to scheduling conflicts preparing for other school events. Activities were often loosely tied to some to monthly themes or events. For example, in October our monthly reader was an anthology of scary stories, so the dungeon game we played utilized a horror-themed prompt; in November, our monthly reader was about the rainforest, so we played a version of the “Dungeon Game” set in the rainforest; and so on. Table 1 gives a brief synopsis of the activities carried out during this research period.

| <u>Date</u> | A: Storytelling Activity | <u>Date</u> | B: Follow-up story writing based on Column A's activity |
|------------------------|---|---------------|---|
| <u>Oct 14</u> | TTRPG: "The Dungeon Game"; teacher-only narrator with a "dragon kidnaps princess" premise. | <u>Oct 15</u> | Storybook: "The Dragon and the King"; a picture book with each student being responsible for the final content of a single page. |
| <u>Oct 27 & 28</u> | TTRPG: "The Dungeon Game"; timed-narrator rotation with a "undead dragon kidnaps Disney Princesses" premise. | <u>Oct 28</u> | Optional writing homework: Previous session "story summary", with option to finish writing out story events after concluding session. |
| <u>Nov 12</u> | TTRPG: "The Dungeon Game"; timed-narrator rotation with a "heroes save rainforest from pollution monster" premise. | N/A | Due to preparation for school Christmas concert on Dec 8, could not schedule a follow up writing activity. |
| <u>Dec 8</u> | Simulation role-play: "NoBo Project", a talent show simulation in tandem with K2 class; students took on roles of competitors, hosts, and judges | <u>Dec 15</u> | Storybook: "The Talent Show"; a picture book with each student being responsible for the final content of a single page. Also, the role-play and storybook both provided background knowledge for their Spring Play in February based on the same premise. |
| <u>Jan 12 & 13</u> | TTRPG: "Space Dungeon Game"; timed-narrator rotation with a "help someone kidnapped by space pirate" premise. | <u>Feb 12</u> | Storybook: "Space Station Rescue"; a picture book with six students being responsible for one page each, and one student being responsible for two pages. |
| <u>Feb 24</u> | Story Dice: Students use five randomly generated icons (amongst ten) on story dice to orally tell a new story together | <u>Feb 24</u> | Mini-Book: Students work together in groups to transfer their oral story into a 5 page mini-book personal (each student was responsible for their own mini-book). |

The storybook writing activities were mediated by me, their teacher, and corrective feedback was often offered after first drafts before they proceeded to rewrite their final drafts. However, just about all narrative, syntactic, and lexical choices were dictated by each student and their current literacy abilities.

V. Results:

As will be seen in survey results later, reception to activities were overall positive. Data was collected via video of class sessions and text of writing projects produced by students based on collaborative storytelling activities. I will do conversation analysis of excerpts from video taken from some of these activities, and text analysis of some of their collaborative writing productions.

My video analysis will focus on some key exchanges between students in several of these activities that I believe show promising co-construction and ZPD expansion for participating students in the domain of storytelling.

My text analysis of the resulting collaborative writing these students produced will analyze four metrics: 1) total words used, 2) number of complete sentences 3) total unique words

used, and 4) number of proper nouns used. I will provide my commentary on this data, and what I think it means for my students' developing literacy during this period.

October 15th, 2020: Text “Dragon and the King” Text Analysis

| Total words used | Number of complete sentences | Total unique words used | Number of unique proper nouns used |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 73 words across 7 pages | 11 sentences (2 with conjunctions) | 35 words | 1 |

This is the first collaborative story book the students wrote based on a “TTRPG” from the week before. The one proper noun used in the story was the name “Jenny”, which was derived from a horror-themed story the children had read the week before and which they decided to use for the name of the princess-character in the story. Sentences overall are short and simple, with only two sentences using conjunctions to create more complex sentence structures.

October 28th: TTRPG “The Dungeon Game” Conversation Excerpt Analysis

Kurt, the teacher; the girls AA, SM, and RM, and the boys AO and YK

- 1 KURT: Alright! Next is, uh, (AO). Say... “(AO), what do you do?”
- 2 Students: AO, what do you do?
- 3 AA: No! Tanjiro! ((Tanjiro is the name of (AO)’s character))
- 4 KURT: “Tanjiro, what do you do?”, sorry. (SM), one more time?
- 5 Students: Tanjiro, what do you do?
- 6 RM: Fight with jack-o-lantern? ((given as suggestion))
- 7 AO: Fight! ((directed at Kurt))
- 8 KURT: Tell (SM), don’t tell me.
- 9 AO: ((to (SM))) Fight.
- 10 KURT: Say, “I fight.”
- 11 AO: I fight.
- 12 RM: With what?
- 13 SM: With what?
- 14 YM: Hammer, hammer, hammer! ((given as suggestion to (AO) as he thinks))
- 15 RM: Scissors? Acorn? Tree? ((playfully giving more suggestions))
- 16 AO: Banana sword!
- 17 KURT: With a banana sword? ((students laugh and respond positively))
- 18 SM: Umm... no! ((as the narrator, SM tries to deny this development))
- 19 KURT: Well, I think it’s okay.
- 20 SM: A different sword... different is okay.
- 21 AA: Eh, it’s a story! ((coming to defense of (AO)’s narrative choice))
- 22 KURT: Well, if he has a banana sword, you think that’s bad?
- 23 SM: ((nods head in the affirmative))
- 24 KURT: Should we take a vote? Who thinks he could have a banana sword? ((all students but SM raise their hands)). Who thinks “no”? (((SM) raises her hand)). C-can you... because everyone said yes, he’ll have the banana sword because

everyone said yes, okay? (((SM) nods positively in agreement))).
25 AA: Yay, it's story, so it's okay!

This exchange took place in a TTRPG (i.e. "The Dungeon Game") with a timed-narrator rotation; that is, every 3 minutes, a new student narrator would be able to help direct and describe the impact of their peer's actions on the developing narrative. In this exchange, student (SM) is the narrator while it is (AO)'s turn to act against a monster "Jack-O-Lantern" they've encountered in a haunted castle. I (Kurt, the teacher) have taken over the role of (SM)'s character, while the other students (YK), (AA), and (RM) give their input from the side lines.

The students (AO) and (SM) are making decisions that affect the shared narrative all of the students are co-constructing. The teacher helps to mediate communication and the decision-making processing. Even as two students are in the decision-making hot seats (one as narrator, and one as the character taking an affection to affect the shared imaginary space), a ZPD is created as other capable students (the students (RM) and (YK)) eagerly give their input in the hopes of still affecting the narrative through the less-capable student (AO), who pauses in order to consider his developing ideas alongside those proffered by his classmates. Ultimately, (AO) decides on a narrative choice that he hopes is amusing and which ends up being taken positively by his peers.

In response, however, (SM) attempts to assert her authority over the narrative counter to (AO)'s desire. I, the teacher, then step in to create another ZPD for (SM) to help her recognize the value of validating a peer's choices and in recognizing consensus in collaboration with her group of peers. As a result, (AA) proclaims her agreement with the over-ruling in favor of what she thinks makes for the best collaborative storytelling approach in our developing "community of practice" (Swain et al., 2010)

December 8th 2020, Simulation Role-play Conversation Excerpt Analysis

Students TK (a K2 student), KH, and SY in the "judge" roles, SM and RM as "hosts", with YK, and two K2 students YD, KY as "talent show competitors".

- 1 SY: What's your name?
- 2 TK: What's your name?
- 3 KH: What's your name?
- 4 YK: We are "Dancers".
- 5 KURT: Big voice, everyone!
- 7 YK, YD, and KY: We are dancers!
- 8 KH: What, uh-
- 9 SY: What dance will you do?
- 10 KH and TK: What dance will you do?
- 11 SY: Again?? ((pointing at two different groups)) BTS, BTS! (((SY) is surprised because a previous group had just done a BTS song))
- 12 TK: Again?? ((imitating SY))
- 13 KURT: Same song, or different song?
- 14 YK: Same song.
- 15 Kurt: Same song? Oh my goodness! So bold!
- 16 YK: Because (YD) is... ((inaudible))

In this activity, the K3 students have combined with the younger K2 class for a simulation role-play based on a TV-style music talent show. Students readily engage in authentic

communiation with no prompting from the teacher; the context of the situation drives the discourse. We also see a ZPD occur when SY initiates most of the conversation with the other group as a “host”, and her peers TK and KH naturally begin to shadow her language pattern in order to follow their most capable host’s conversational lead.

December 15, 2020- “The Talent Show” Text Analysis

| Total words used | Number of complete sentences | Total unique words used | Number of unique proper nouns used |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 82 words across 7 pages | 11 sentences (4 with conjunctions) | 49 words | 4 |

The week after the simulation role-play, the students wrote another collaborative storybook based on the events of that activity. The features of the storybook have become more complex than their previous book in October: overall, this story used more words and unique word uses than their previous product. Although the number of sentences were the same, the increased use of conjunctions to create more complex sentences as well as the increased number of proper nouns for more named characters indicates a slightly more complex story structure than their previous book. This is reflected in the content of the story as well, which featured two protagonist groups competing for the same goal, as opposed to the slightly simple good vs. evil themes of their October story.

January 12th, 2020- TTRPG “Space Dungeon Game” Conversation Excerpt Analysis

Kurt helps (KH), the current narrator, figure out the movements of a space monster in relation to the “heroes”, while girls (RM), (SM), (SY), and (AA), and boys (YK) and (AO) wait to see what happens.

- 1 KURT: Where does he go?
- 2 KH: The monster...
- 3 RM: He goes here? ((points at the space-station themed tile game map))
- 4 KH: Go to here. ((points at a different place on the game map))
- 5 KURT: HAHAAAAAAAA ((KURT touches the monster and affects a devious laugh, to which the rest of the students respond with a squeal of excitement)).
- 6 KURT: (KH), YOU move it, you’re the narrator! (((KH) moves the monster piece)) What does he do?
- 7 SY: Fight with this little mouse! ((points to the piece representing “David”, an anthropomorphic space mouse)).
- 8 KURT: Now he... now mouse’s right there (x x). ((students giggle)) What does the monster do? ((giggling continues; Kurt next elicits group response to help refocus)) Everyone, ask (KH): “What does the monster do?”
- 9 SY: Fight with mouse, or something?
- 10 KH: That monster... ((slightly long pause))
- 11 RM: Take this mouse...
- 12 KURT: Does he attack-
- 13 KH: Take the mouse!
- 14 SY: Where?
- 15 RM: Take that mouse where?
- 16 KH: Into...
- 17 SY: Space?
- 18 AA: And from.. and drop from the sky?
- 19 KH: In this... here. ((points at a corner of the map, past a grouping of the hero game pieces))

20 KURT: So, he takes the mouse over here, like this? HAHAHHA ((Kurt picks up the monster and “David” pieces and moves them across the game board. The students squeal excitedly)). Ah, but guess what! 3 minutes! (SY)’s turn! ((Kurt passes the timer to Sara))

We see a lot of the same elements in this TTRPG as our previous excerpt, with other students interjecting and offering spontaneous story possibilities to the student-narrator in order to affect the collaborative story. The narrator, (KH), is slower to make decisions than his more capable peers, but I believe we see his ZPD expand as he is able to navigate the numerous mediative suggestions from his peers and make finally make narrative decisions on his own. The teacher also opens up a “dramatic” ZPD for his students by helping move the pieces animatedly and using character voices to help heighten the fun and dramatic tension of the situation, leading to students becoming engaged not just cognitively but emotionally as well.

February 12th 2021 – “Space Station Rescue” Storybook

| Total words used | Number of complete sentences | Total unique words used | Number of unique proper nouns used |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 105 words across 8 pages | 17 sentences (4 with conjunctions) | 49 words | 5 |

The collaborative storybook for this story took place several weeks after the adventure it was based on was played; the time delay was mostly due to scheduling conflicts with the Spring Play event they spent considerable time preparing for. However, their memory of the events of their game the month before was fairly good. I believe this might be indicative of the power of the vivid mental imagery those kinds of collaborative storytelling games generate for the children partaking in them.

Overall, this story was slightly more complex than the previous story; while the number of unique words were the same, the total words and sentences to write their story had increased, as had the number of unique pronouns, which is reflective of the greater number of characters participating in their story. Another interesting development of this story book was the use of dialogue and dialogue quotations by some of the student, which is another complex feature that was not present before in their previous storybook.

February 14th Story Dice Writing Analysis:

Group One: “Nice Story” (group of three students)

| Total words used | Number of complete sentences | Total unique words used | Number of unique proper nouns used |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 42 words across 6 pages (include title page) | 6 sentences (2 with conjunctions) | 26 words | 0 |

Group Two: “The Little Bear’s Story” (group of four students)

| Total words used | Number of complete sentences | Total unique words used | Number of unique proper nouns used |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 42 words across 6 pages (includes title) | 5 sentences (0 with conjunctions) | 24 words | 0 |

These stories were written with almost zero mediation from the teacher; the entire story writing process was mediated by the artifacts at their disposable (i.e. the story dice) and each other. While their stories were less complex overall than their previous stories, the speed and independence with which they completed this writing activity makes its an

attractive tool to revisit in the future and see whether complexity increases as their competency with the medium develops. Another interesting feature of this activity is the near total lack of proper nouns. Previous role-play based stories placed greater emphasis on characters, which then found their way into their stories. Granted, the “Little Bear’s Story” does have a protagonist which is loosely derivative of a storybook also titled “Little Bear” they had been reading that month. However, “Nice Story” lacks a central character, and is a narrative based totally around loosely connected events occurring.

Activity Conclusions

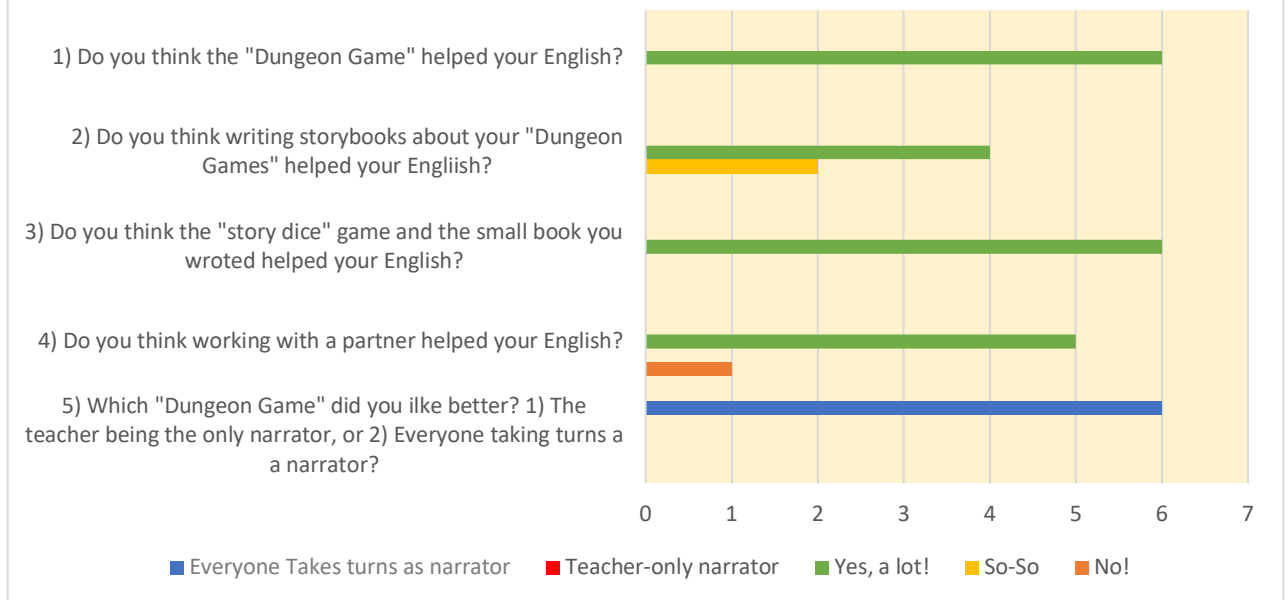
Across this range of activities, I believe I saw my students improve in their ability to understand, engage with, and understand stories in English, both oral and literary. I believe this had positive effects on their speaking ability in activities that encouraged constant dialogue with both each other and their teacher, as well as their reading and writing ability as they worked together to devise increasingly complex storytelling artifacts that reflected their growing competency with the skill of storytelling as a whole.

Survey

On March 17, I conducted a five-question survey with six students who agreed to be interviewed. Each interview was audio recorded. The method for the survey interview was the teacher assisting them in reading and understanding four Likert scale questions with 3 items each and one Likert Scale question with 2 items; each Likert scale question was paired with an open response follow-up question. The students personally marked their response on each Likert Scale, and the teacher made note of their verbal open response to the follow-up question. Consent was received from both the students and their parents to share their responses for this report.

On this survey, I also excluded questions about their “simulation role-play”. The reason for this is that activity became heavily tied in their memory to the Spring Play which they spent many weeks rehearsing, and I thought their recall on that specific activity would be too obviously skewed by unrelated subsequent events.

Mar 17 Survey on Collaborative Storytelling Activities (Interview Survey with six students)



Student Comments

Comment Analysis 1: Response to question 1, "Do you think the 'Dungeon Game' helped your English?" (Kurt= teacher; (RM) and (SY)= students doing survey together)

- 1 RM: Can I circle it?
- 2 Kurt: Yes, you can. Go head. Circle it.
- 3 RM: ...Three?
- 4 Kurt: Yeah, make it three. You can write three.
- 5 RM: Next (SY), read it!
- 6 Kurt: Why do you think so? [No], why do you think so?
- 7 RM: Because-
- 8 Kurt: *[overlapping]* I'll write this part.
- 9 SY: Because- it's fun?
- 10 RM: It's fun.
- 11 Kurt: *[overlapping]* Anything else?
- 12 RM: And- and-
- 13 SY: *[overlapping]* And it's great!
- 14 RM: And it's... funny.
- 15 Kurt: Anything else?
- 16 RM: And scary.
- 17 Kurt: Anything else?
- 18 SY: And great!
- 19 Kurt: Anything else?
- 20 RM: No.

(RM)'s observation that "The Dungeon Game" can be scary and funny as well as fun provides insight into why collaborative storytelling activities are able to captivate a young learner's attention and imagination so well: it's a type of discourse that gives them access to a range of interesting or exciting emotions. The fact that this occurs in a fairly predictable and contained context might make such activities an attractive activity space for them to return to and explore.

Comment Analysis 2: Response to question 1 (Kurt= teacher; AO= student)

- 1 Kurt: Why did it help you?
- 2 AO: Because... because... my head gonna be strong.
- 3 Kurt: Really? You think it made your head strong?
- 4 AO: *[affirmative grunt]*
- 5 Kurt: What do you- how?
- 6 AO: Like... wake up.
- 7 Kurt: *[inquisitive grunt]*
- 8 AO: *[affirming]* Wake up.
- 9 Kurt: Like waking up?
- 10 Kurt: *[repeating]* Waking up.

This question was difficult for (AO) to answer; he is the youngest in his class, and sometimes has difficulty expressing himself in his L2 verbally. However, the personal imagery evoked by his response to the question strike me as being very creative, perhaps implying that, for him, these kinds of collaborative storytelling activities helped broaden his developing cognitive abilities.

Extract 3: Response to question 5, "Which Dungeon Game Did You Like Better?" (Kurt= teacher; SM= student)

- 1 Kurt: *(referring to Option 2)* Why do you like that one better?
- 2 SM: Ummm... because everybody can do turns- *(attempts to self-correct)* everybody can a turn. And then...teacher can [a] turn too, so...

This student expressed a feeling that I believe all my students shared about storytelling games and narrating. The students felt best about these activities when they were able to exercise their agency in the role of a narrator making decisions to help shape the stories they developed together.

Survey Conclusions

Student response to collaborative storytelling activities, follow-up writing activities, and peer-mediated approaches have been positive overall. The only negative response on the survey interview was from student AO regarding question four (working with a partner); the student's answer was difficult to understand because he did not know how to express it at all in English, and I had trouble interpreting it. However, he seemed to personally feel strongly that working with a partner did not benefit him.

Another interesting to note on this survey is that I gave each student the option to answer the open-response questions in English or Japanese. However, all students stuck with answering in English only. The most likely reasons for this are because of the schedule

context (i.e. surveys were taken during their “English” time and not their “Japanese” time), and their English-only relationship with the activities they’re being asked to recall. My role as their “English interlocutor/authority figure” also likely plays a strong part, although students often speak with me in Japanese during their specific Japanese class time, so that may actually be less of a factor than it initially appears.

VI. What I learned:

Throughout the semester, “The Dungeon Game” was one of my student’s most frequently requested activities. I discovered the benefits of using such activities for writing activities, as it created a shared experience which could be recurred to build collaborative writing activities. In turn, the product of that writing (usually in the form of a storybook) could be revisited by students both as recall of the original oral story-telling activity, and as recursive reading practice. The storybooks were kept on our classroom bookshelf amongst their other available reading books. In fact, re-readings of the resulting collaborative storybooks were highly popular throughout the year. Students continuously choose it for free-reading activities, and some students specifically selected them for book-reading activities in afterschool care to share with different teachers and students outside of their normal class.

The “student-narrator” role for these TTRPG activities was also a great development, I thought. It provided more agency for students in this type of activity and seemed to consistently lead to authentic and creative communication between students and their teacher. I believe it was both fun and easy for students to create various zones of proximal development with one another to develop a variety of peer-mediated oral and literary storytelling skills.

That being said, although my students and I all quite liked the TTRPG-style of collaborative storytelling activities for their fun and high-cognitive engagement, its open-ended nature often led to too much classroom time being spent to complete these activities, often spanning across two days. As a result, our class discovered that object-based storytelling activities (i.e. story dice) can be fun and rewarding as well. I was also surprised by my students’ interaction with story dice: an activity that I believed would take 5 or 6 minutes was finished in almost half the time due to their fluency in interpreting objects on the dice to build coherent sentences with them within a mutually-agreed upon narrative structure.

As a teacher, I believe I witnessed positive overall effects with my students by engaging with these activities. I recall one student, who I will refer to as “AA”, noting the difficulty she had in creating mental imagery towards the beginning of the semester. Towards the end of the semester, however, she was one of the most eager participants in using her imagination in these types of activities. Another student, “AO”, had great difficulty in writing and reading independently at the beginning of the semester. Towards the end of the semester, his decoding ability had improved greatly, and he was much more eager to try reading new stories than before. Obviously, it’s difficult to specifically tie specific language outcomes to these general speaking and writing activities. However, overall student positivity and desire to repeatedly re-engage with these types of activities leads me to want to continue exploring their possible correlation.

I also discovered (a little too late) that my particular teaching context has issues with dealing with an almost overwhelming amount of data, and the importance of trying to

focus in on a segment of my context to explore. Going forward, this is something I'm really looking to become stronger in; I believe I also need to revisit some of my basic AR and qualitative data readings to improve my fundamental research methodologies. I have also been discovering some of the unique difficulties of doing research with very young learners; I need to develop better tools for understanding my particular class context. Asta Cekaitte's paper from 2007 has been very useful in this report as an initial model for my research in interviewing and analyzing young learner conversations.

VII. Future Issues:

I'd like to explore these tools again with my next kindergarten class, which has its own challenges: the incoming class overall is slightly bigger with an overall weaker language competency than the class that just graduated, with some noted behavior issues with their previous main teacher as well. I want to explore these activities in that context and see whether or not collaborative story telling is a good tool to help create ZPDs in which they can improve their abilities to interact and use English.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Key:

(()) : further comments of the transcriber
(x x) : unsure transcription
HAHA : indicates laughter with loud volume
YOU : relatively high amplitude