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Shining Lights: The Power of Students as Storytellers

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SHINING LIGHTS:
THE POWER OF STUDENTS AS STORYTELLERS

Marisa A. Johns

May 2024

A thesis in the field of Childhood Education
submitted for the Degree of Master of Science in Education
in the Art of Teaching Program
SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

Abstract

We all have stories waiting to be told, and this thesis intends to explore the ways in which we as educators can support children as innate storytellers and nurture a love of storytelling. Storytelling first emerges through imaginative play during early childhood, and lends itself to the development of literacy skills they can later use to tell their stories. The continuation of play-based learning for upper elementary students is necessary in maintaining their original voice and imagination alive in their storymaking. Along with oral and written stories, we have to embrace dramatic arts and visual storytelling as mediums for students to create stories and express themselves without barriers. In the writer's workshop, teachers take on the role of story-supporter, where they provide scaffolding for the diverse range of storytellers and build a relationship where they feel wholly seen and heard by not just the teacher, but their peers as well. All of these ideas advocating for children's stories to be honored in the classroom contribute to the bigger picture of fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness, as it is an empowering feeling they can carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Dedication & Acknowledgements

I dedicate my master's thesis to my mother and fifth-grade teacher, Mattie Lucadamo. My mother's unwavering love and belief in me has been vital in pushing through to get to this point. I love you and thank you for blessing me with a world full of stories. Mrs. Lucadamo embodies what teaching should be- to love and uplift children. She went above and beyond in order to understand who I was, where I was during a difficult year, and reminded me of my potential by providing the right support around me. Thank you for your humanity- you inspired me to teach.

I want to shine a light on all that have supported me and were integral within the last five years of my college education. I am grateful for the family that has been rooting for me from the start, my partner who has been a steady anchor, and to friends who know how hard I've been working toward this dream. When I decided to continue my education, Diana Berman opened the door for me at Westchester Community College. Thank you for seeing I was as passionate about teaching as you are and helping me believe in myself again, and for every professor at Westchester Community College that saw the spirited learner in me. If it wasn't for Diana, Rue Beckerman, and Denisha Jones, who all helped in establishing the pilot transfer initiative for education majors, I wouldn't have been able to attend Sarah Lawrence College and the Art of Teaching program.

Since my admittance, I cherish the opportunities and endless support Rue and Denisha have given me in order to grow and thrive. I want to also thank Rue for her support in helping me develop this thesis, as it is a culmination of the unforgettable path she paved for us all this year as program director. Lorayne Carbon is a warm hug- I thank and admire your devotion to the Early Childhood Center, giving priceless, healing experiences of working with children and how liberating education should feel. I am in awe of the wisdom I gained from watching ECC teachers at work, and I count my lucky stars to have worked with Debi Riessen my first year in this program. Debi knew it took deep reflection of our inner-child to do the work we do and to generate the ethical teaching practices that children need in their most formative years. What a gift it was to feel safe doing that with you. To the Art of Teaching faculty- Farrah Gilani, Emily Cullen-Dunn, Genny Ward-Wernet, Pamela Tanenbaum, Cindy Puccio, Kim Ferguson- you all have equipped me with a transformative education I hold onto for the rest of my life and will apply in my classroom, thank you supporting my work and teaching endeavors.

In my undergrad, I had the privilege of attending classes with professors outside of the Art of Teaching program who made an impact. I'd like to acknowledge Barbara Schechter, who I had the pleasure of being part of her last child development course- you walked me through what would be the start of a rigorous but rewarding process. Thank you for the foundational tools of what it takes to become a purposeful teacher. Thanks to Allen Lang, who enlightened me on the work of teaching artists through civic engagement and Tristana Rorandelli- *hai insegnato con passione la bellissima lingua italiana, ma soprattutto, mi hai aiutato a sentirmi connesso alla mia eredità italiana, grazie.*

I also had the opportunity to get to know, observe the work of and collaborate with some of the best educators working in Westchester public schools. School 30 and School 9 in Yonkers, and Mamaroneck Avenue School in White Plains, I appreciate you allowing me to do field work in your schools. I am singing the praises of my host teachers this past year, Afsaneh Parandian and Annie Williams. I am sincerely grateful to the two of you for allowing me to create lessons with you and take risks in your classrooms, to have received crucial feedback and advice for how to best support children, and most of all, getting to witness your love for your students. You inspire me greatly.

Lastly- to my cohort. Attending these classes beside you all, engaging in countless meaningful and relevant conversations around children and education, and building the values to become the educators we want to see in the world together leaves me with hope. Be proud of the work you've invested. There will be generations of students fortunate to have teachers like you. I wish you all immense success in your future.

Annotated Outline

I. Introduction and Thesis Content

- A. Self-recollection as a storyteller; what it meant to me as a child/student when given the opportunity to play out, workshop, and share my stories in school
 1. Early childhood experiences of storytelling through play lent itself to emerging literacy skills and sparked curiosity to learn how to share stories in new ways- also gave sense of community
 - Quote: "Inside each of us is a natural-born storyteller, waiting to be released." (Moore, 1991)
 2. Remembering elementary teachers who had morning journaling, creative writing activities, gave proper support, and encouraged me to share with my classmates that established and nurtured my own voice; exploring of other storytelling forms (songs, scripts)
 3. Sharing original stories was the one moment throughout the school day I felt seen by my peers- I fell in love with the art of storytelling
 4. Curriculum for upper grades left little room for student's original stories and ELA work became one of the only instances where original voice was still being valued- middle & high school stiffened creativity
 - Quote: "How can I explain to anyone that stories are like air to me, I breathe them in and let them out over and over again." (Woodson, 2014)
- B. My journey as a student and the wisdom gained during my experiences as an education major set the inspiration for my thesis.

★ Thesis Statement: There is lasting power in making opportunities for children to create original stories in school. It is our honor as educators to introduce, support, and encourage students in sharing the various forms of storytelling they bring into our classroom communities. When we shine lights on the voices of children as innate storytellers, we provide them a sense of belonging.

C. Table of Contents- Setting the stage for main points being explored in my thesis

★ Storytelling Emerges from Play - focusing on the fascinating development of make-believe, roleplaying and stories that happen in early childhood

★ Storytellers & the Arts - focusing on the benefit of storytelling taking the shape of visual and theatrical arts

★ Story-Supporters in the Workshop - looking at the teacher's role in the storytelling workshop; reflecting on beliefs, best practices, and lessons used in placements

★ A Story's Power in Belonging - highlighting moments that contribute to a sense of belonging when children share their stories with each other

II. Storytelling Emerges from Play

A. Taking a glimpse at early childhood and where original storytelling begins

1. Role-playing, make believe is where stories naturally emerge and begin for the storyteller prior to any literacy skills

- Quote: "Lots of stories, adult-authored and child-authored, stories in the service of creating a common classroom culture- can be a basic vehicle for individual development, for through stories young children can confront their personal and imaginative worlds so that they come to understand them." (Cooper, 1993)

2. Understanding the benefits and what is happening developmentally for the child when creating stories through independent and collaborative play

- Quote: "The influence of play on a child's development is enormous. Play in an imaginary situation is a novel form of behavior liberating the child from constraints." (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Anecdote: 2s observations in play, stories starting to shine through
- Anecdote: PKP observations in play, stories everywhere

3. Teacher facilitation of helicopter stories in oral storytelling; window to get a sense of child's thinking, creativity and parts of who they are at home

- Quote: "It is play, of course, but it is also story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form. The distinctions are important to me because this story playing and storytelling has become the curriculum of any classroom in which I am the teacher. Somewhere in each fantasy is a lesson that promises to lead me to questions and commentary, allowing me to glimpse the universal themes that bind together the individual urgencies." (Paley, 1990)

4. Child-made scenes that set a story and providing the resources (toys, blocks, puppets, paint, the outdoors) and creating the safe space for children to set scenes for their play

- Anecdote: 2s and careful incorporation of materials that help a child imagine, set and act out their play stories
 - Anecdote: PKP and classroom materials, play stations that help aid children in telling original stories
- B. Advocating for play past early childhood for the continuation of original stories
1. There has to be a continuation of original storytelling through play - there should be no shift, even more so after literacy skills have started to develop
 2. Nurturing curiosity and motivation to create, learn and exercise their original voices; stories from collaborative play and what it can do for older students' social development

III. Storytellers and the Arts

- A. There are many theatrical aspects within the sharing of students' original stories, and classrooms should be a welcoming stage for such types of storytelling
1. The use of drama and workshopping student's written scripts to create, collaborate and perform an original story or retelling of a known story
 2. Roleplay and improvisation, sometimes with and without prompts, often model real-world scenarios that help children process their understanding of the world around them (e.g, Mantle of the Expert Approach)
 - Quote: "The teacher and students evolve a sequence of episodes, not based on plot and subtext as for a script, but on context and curriculum. The mantle of the expert episodes must be faithful to both, as clean and lean as any densely made play." (Heathcote & Bolton, p. 174, 1995)
 - Anecdote: School 9 and civic engagement work
 - Anecdote: 5W Stories in Science scripts
 3. Students can share parts of who they are at home and culturally through storytelling involving the use of song and dance; classroom being a safe space for children to perform these forms of stories with/to peers
 - Quote: "The arts make it possible for all children, regardless of their differences, to participate fully in the process of education." (Gallas, 1994)
 - Anecdote: 5W student who made a rap about the solar eclipse
- B. Embracing visual storytelling as an art and language for all students to shine and express themselves
1. If teachers convey that book illustrations support stories, or often can tell a story greater than written words do- then we have to view a student's visual storytelling of an original story with the same thinking
 2. It shouldn't just be art teachers introducing children to different types of visual art; exploring and utilizing visual art mediums as a form of student storytelling (drawn/digital/mixed art piece, sculpting, comics, flip-books, photography, videos)
 - Quote: "Artists are reshaping, reclaiming, and reframing stories, both personal and communal, along with the information those stories may be built around, and taking an active, and in many cases

inventive, role in transmitting their versions of stories. Who gets to tell the story, and through which art form, is in the hands of each and every one of us." (Donahue & Stuart, 2010)

- Anecdote: SLC class experience & campus map activity, improvising with mixed materials to convey a story
3. Giving student-choice for how they want to convey a story empowers all students to create without barriers in the classroom, but especially children who aren't confident in verbally sharing, singing, acting, writing will now have an entry point to shine
 - Anecdote: 5W art in Storytelling in Science project
 - Anecdote: Various artworks from students in placements that depict a story or specific message

IV. Story-Supporters in the Workshop

- A. The teacher's main role in the story/writing workshop- aiding students in finding, maintaining and strengthen their original voice
 1. Teaching practices supporting stories from multilingual children
 - Quote: "Writing workshop can be a space where children share their experiences, fully engage their linguistic expertise, negotiate social relationships, and author imagined worlds." (Martell & Souto-Manning, 2016)
 - Anecdote: SLC Pamela's class, making bilingual poem/story book
 2. Teachers scribing for lower and upper elementary, scaffolding with writing assisting children with their original/personal stories, and being mindful of prompts we give children without imposing influence
 - Anecdote: PKP scribing for students in collaborative storytelling
- B. Original student storytelling is a valuable tool for interdisciplinary learning
 1. Teachers should strive to show students where their original stories can fit into math, science, social studies curriculum
 - Quote: "Not all children naturally identify their serious musings with the world of science. Somehow for them, science is something mysterious and vague, and their life has nothing to do with the subject. But until a teacher perceives that point of view and works with it, those children remain relatively unable to benefit from science instruction." (Gallas, 1994)
 2. Interdisciplinary storytelling projects I've created/used in placements
- C. Summary of my beliefs in teaching practices that shine a light on diverse, original student voices
 1. Universal Design for Learning (UdL) as a framework and observations of students' interests, strengths for story/writing workshop lesson plans
 2. Student's stories in various styles as a valued means of teaching assessment and an archive of original work over the school year
 3. Project-based learning (PBL) approach to writer's workshop; exploring the process of developing stories and writing an original story over time can be a deeply meaningful project for a student

4. When opportunities for open-format storytelling are provided, can build students' confidence in their own voice for ELA assignments; when I have to teach or assign work that requires more specific, structured responses, the hope is students will rise to the occasion because they see I hear them and encourage self-expression outside of those scenarios
 - Quote: "Facilitating a constructive workshop experience requires setting our sights more clearly on where kids are coming from and where their experimentation might take both them and us." (Hamel, 2017)

V. Storytellers and Belonging

- A. Creating a classroom community with students that help students to be included, seen, respected & empowered when sharing original/personal stories
 1. Making story sharing norms with students and opportunities for some types of shares to receive constructive student feedback
 2. Knowing where to step in as facilitator of sharing process- when to ask questions/point out what you noticed, or possibly share on their behalf
 3. Sharing moments where students empowered by sharing their stories and what I can do in the future for students who experience the opposite effect
 - Anecdote: PKP, specific student vignette
 - Anecdote: 5W, specific student vignette
- B. Making original stories with peers, facilitating story-building exercises in mixed peer groups
 1. Exposure to different perspectives & thinking in collaborative storytelling- encouraging mixed groups where strengths could be well complimented
 2. Home and cultural representation through personal storytelling with each other that reflects classroom diversity
 - Quote: "Children need to be heard and need to hear each other. We teachers can learn from the kinds of questions the young children we teach ask in their homes and communities and use them for teaching." (Martell & Souto-Manning, 2016)
- C. Student's personal stories from their real lives being shared in different ways
 1. What students choose to share with you or each other serves some sort of purpose for that child- it's a special moment, it's fun, it's a true story but it's how I view it, it helps people see me and where I come from, it's vulnerable for me to share but I feel comfortable doing that here
 2. When teachers model how to listen, respect & respond to students' stories, the sharing experiences can serve as windows, mirrors, & sliding glass doors
 - Quote: "Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we see our own lives and experiences as a part of the larger human experience." (Bishop, 1990)

VI. Closing & Thank You

- A. Closing Remarks & Thank-yous

1. Being a storyteller inspired me to build a philosophy that I can into practice, where I remain a storyteller and become the spotlight for student's stories as the teacher
 - Quote: "Children don't remember what you try to teach them. They remember what you are." (Henson, 2005)
2. Brief acknowledgements & thanks

Process Paper

As a student, and even more so as I began my journey as an education major, the only way I have been able to achieve concrete learning and create work meaningful to me is to grow from my experiences and be reflective as possible in the process. I also knew my growth required educators that gave proper support and as many opportunities as possible to express myself and now it is my lifelong goal as a future educator to provide that same experience for my students. I was inspired by how empowering it was when family, teachers and peers saw me through original and personal stories that I got to tell in different ways. Perhaps more than me being the aspiring writer that was seen by my classroom community, this thesis was influenced by memories in school and moments in my student-teaching placements where I saw children hesitant or unable to feel the same type of empowerment. I went into developing this thesis with the reflective question of- "I know what I can do to uplift students like me, but now what can I do to make all types of storytellers, and the stories they bring into my classroom, visible?" and as always, ran with that feeling.

The bulk of the work was centered around children and their stories, but through that, there had to be research on what educators are doing to uplift these children as story-supporters. In a world of curriculum and standardization that can be devoid of creativity, it is an art of teachers to figure out where they can incorporate student's lives and interests to the work, and continue to encourage students in using their original voices and imagination to create. The stories that came forward in journaling or writing assignments, art, class conversations, and students' play is what I use as a roadmap for experimentation with the lesson plans and activities I created for my student teaching placements. Using what I gather in those observations, then I figure out which standards

across all subjects correlate to the storytelling projects I brought into these classrooms. The ELA and writer's workshop should embrace many uses of the arts (dramatic, musical, visual) and has to be interdisciplinary, especially when we know science and social studies have taken a backseat in dedicated time these past few years. In my college classes, a lot of projects I created and led were story and community based. From an ecosystem unit in Emergent Curriculum, writing a children's book in Math & Technology about growth mindset, to other SLC courses like a DnD campaign that we adapted into a script for a table-read when I was a theater third- I just wanted to bring people together with an ability we all possess, if and when we're given the right support.

I took so much of what I was doing in my college classes and in my student teaching placements to put these ideas into practice I felt very passionate about. It was a deeply gratifying and reassuring experience as a student-teacher to see the impact of scribing and making the Winter Stories in Nature book for Mrs. Parandian's pre-k class, and I knew that for my thesis, it would be nice to garner a similar response again. This time, with my fifth graders in Mrs. Williams' class. The original goal was to just see what stories students wanted to make when given a choice in how they wanted to tell the story, as this would be a lesson that not only set out to inspire the students, but would be used to support my thesis. However, I needed to work with the fact it had to be a shorter activity and because the time to do it would be in the block Mrs. Williams used it for science, I used that to my benefit and made it so that it was still giving choice but now they were picking topics in their science units they've covered so far as a prompt for an original story. The end result of doing this- and getting to see students shine using a storytelling form they chose- was a moment I could not wait to capture throughout my thesis.

This thesis felt like a trip down memory lane while still supporting this specific, central idea of empowering students as storytellers. I got to look back and gather all the inclusive practices and models I learned about that opened my eyes to new perspectives on education and what it means to be a purposeful teacher that fosters a class community and curriculum where students feel seen. I

got to apply what inspired me into my own pedagogy, and for this thesis I got to pull the work I got to do with lower and upper elementary students that allowed me and their peers to see each child for who they are, where they are through the creation of stories. I incorporated the wisdom from my insightful host-teachers who have loved and uplifted children in their self expression for many years in the teaching field. Most importantly, my thesis helped me in confidently recognizing I am more than ready to enter and support a future classroom, full of storytellers, so they feel a sense of belonging. This calls to the inner-child and student in me, seeking out to belong, and the power of creating and sharing stories in my classroom was what made me feel that and believe it.

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Good morning everyone and thank you all for attending my thesis presentation, Shining Lights: The Power of Students as Storytellers. I would like to dedicate my thesis to my mother and my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Lucadamo. Thank you for believing in me, helping me believe in myself, and making my stories feel celebrated.

I have been fortunate to work with professors who believe in the value of partaking in reflective practices. Recollecting who I was as a child and student in school has been essential in building a philosophy around the educator I strive to be. In Art of Teaching fashion, I'd like to recollect my experiences as a storyteller, starting with a quote from author Robin Moore.

INTRODUCTION

storyteller recollection



**“Inside each of us is
a natural-born
storyteller, waiting
to be released.”
(Moore, 1991)**



As a toddler, when playing make-believe by myself or with others I was creating stories before the emergence of literacy skills. I was read stories, watched stories come to life on screen, danced and sang to music with stories in them, and hand-crafted stories with art. Collaborative play where a lot of storytelling naturally occurred was my favorite, sometimes purely fantastical and other times to mirror the world around me. These scenarios I would build on with family and other children gave me the feeling that making stories was a way to connect. I loved that feeling.

By the time I started pre-k, the forms of storytelling and play I engaged in were already lending itself to the development of literacy skills. The sharing of original stories also welcomed me into a classroom as part of its community. It was one moment during the school day that I felt seen by my peers. I had teachers who made room for activities that celebrated creative expression, and beyond teaching us how to read and write, there were teachers that emphasized to us what we put down on paper or verbally shared had the power to reach others and convey specific emotions. I would run wild with morning journals- whether it was a real life story exaggerated to entertain, or using a prompt to write the 4th installment of an original series. It was an empowering experience when teachers encouraged me to share out loud, and when I got bored of doing the same thing in writing workshop, they gave me the proper support to explore other ways to tell stories- like with a song or a script. Even when things weren't as easy for me in other spaces, my own voice was heard and nurtured when present in my teachers' classrooms. For everything else I did in school, I had the confidence to put special touches into my work.

INTRODUCTION
storyteller recollection



**“How can I explain to anyone that stories are like air to me, I breathe them in and let them out over and over again.”
(Woodson, 2014)**

After fifth grade, the curriculum shifted and the demand of teachers meant that opportunities to write and tell original stories dwindled. For many students, this may start earlier in upper grades, but there was a clear lack of balance for self expression. I remember the day ELA work that called for any creativity started to feel so rare. There had been many times prior where I had to generate more specific and structured responses, but never did I feel like I couldn't create stories outside of ELA, nor did I feel I had to replicate a voice that wasn't mine. My motivation to remain a storyteller in school was stiffened by the time I graduated high school. What's great is that fulfilling projects in college restored the innate storyteller in me, as professors wanted nothing more than my original ideas, stories and lived experiences to be turned into celebrated work.

INTRODUCTION thesis and content

There is lasting power in making opportunities for children to create original stories in school. It is our honor as educators to introduce, support, and encourage students in sharing the various forms of storytelling they bring into our classroom communities. When we shine lights on the voices of children as innate storytellers, we provide a sense of belonging.

storytelling emerges from play

storytellers and the arts

story-supporters in the workshop

storytellers and belonging

My lifelong journey as a storyteller, combined with the wisdom gained from my experiences as an education major, sets the inspiration for my thesis. There is lasting power in making opportunities for children to create original stories in school. It is our honor as educators to introduce, support, and encourage students in sharing the various forms of storytelling they bring into our classroom communities. When we shine lights on the voices of children as innate storytellers, we provide a sense of belonging. My recollection served as a roadmap to these ideas I feel passionate about in education. Firstly- that play is where children's innate ability to tell stories begins.

STORYTELLING & PLAY

imaginary play & child development

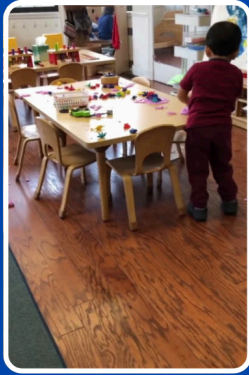
KEY IDEAS

- make-believe, roleplay and oral storytelling are where children's stories first come to life
- early childhood education modeled around piaget's theory on imaginary play

"Lots of stories, adult-authored and child-authored, stories in the service of creating a common classroom culture- can be a basic vehicle for individual development, for **through stories young children can confront their personal and imaginative worlds so that they come to understand them.**"
(Cooper, 1993)

Make-believe, roleplay, and oral storytelling are the kinds of play where we get to see children's stories first come to life. At the end of the sensorimotor stage, two year olds don't yet know how to fully read, write, and barely started using spoken language to communicate. What they do know is the world of play and mirroring. Educator Patsy Cooper recognizes the impact of child-authored stories acted out in play or verbally shared as a vehicle for individual development. Cooper's belief that children have stories in search of a classroom supports those who advocate for early childhood education modeled around Piaget's theory on play as central for cognitive and social development. While there are scenarios in play that pose similarities in topic, they are never played out the same. Each child has their own unique way of telling a story through vibrant pretend play.

STORYTELLING & PLAY stories begin to shine through in 2s



"The influence of play on a child's development is enormous. Play in an imaginary situation is a novel form of behavior liberating the child from constraints." (Vygotsky, 1978)

Being a part of the 2s parent program at the early childhood center, I connected and observed in real-time the child development theories I learned about unfold over the year. From the works of Vygotsky, Piaget, Mahler- I recognized how important it was to have background knowledge as to what's happening developmentally during the early formative years. It was fascinating to work with two year olds who were all experiencing the subphase of rapprochement but in different ways while adapting to a new communal environment for play. Vygotsky's theory that play is what liberates the child from constraints, echoing Piaget, became clear as each child got more comfortable in utilizing Debi's classroom to explore and solidify new schemata. This gave me a window into how I can best scaffold their thinking and skill-building. What I found in my personal observations, was whether make-believe play was reserved or expressive, independent or shared- these were the beginnings of their ability to tell stories using their imagination.

These are just a small handful of memories I had in the 2s program where I saw stories emerging through unique styles of imaginative play. Debi, Ally and myself were there to keep them safe and reassure their emotions and ideas. When we were invited to join in on the play and story-making, we took on roles that didn't pose an influence on their play, but would help them stay immersed in imaginative and mirrored worlds. Whenever the children mirrored parts of their real and personal world with us and each other, it was a bonding experience that helped in the process of separation and individuation.

STORYTELLING & PLAY
stories are everywhere in PKP



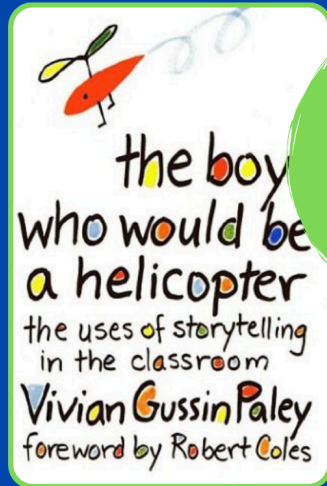
IDEA IN OBSERVATION

When their creativity is nurtured through play-based learning, exercising newfound autonomy, and they're exposed to multimodal storytelling, children start to recognize they too are storytellers.

From storytelling first emerging through play in the 2s program, to a Pre-K classroom where the children arrived with stories every day, it was fascinating to see what changes as children further develop their cognitive and language skills. When their creativity is nurtured through play-based learning, exercising newfound autonomy, and they're exposed to multimodal storytelling, children start to recognize they too are storytellers. Stories children recalled from personal experiences or entirely made up were in need of an environment that showed them this is an ability we all possess, and we can use it to help us connect. Enabling this mindset sparked the curiosity and motivation in children to explore new ways to tell stories outside of play, and reminded them storytelling at the heart is a social act.

Some children in Mrs. Parandian's class were always seeking an audience, making up stories on the spot or impatiently waiting to share a personal story of theirs. Animated and deliberate storytelling was happening most frequently during any sort of collaborative play- where children directed each other with instructions concerned with attention to detail. I'd watch them figure out who would take on what role, explain which objects symbolizes something in their story, and how like a book, things would play out in an order of events that deeply mattered to the children. There were also the children who preferred doing things independently, or were more shy in nature, but they engaged in imaginative play that involved worldbuilding. I saw as children created, revisited and revised narratives in their play throughout the week. For every kind of child that was in PKP, there was a story unraveling in their play, art, and spoken language, and Mrs. Parandian and I gave them the opportunities to make and share them.

STORYTELLING & PLAY
paley & helicopter stories



"It is play, of course, but it is also story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form. The distinctions are important to me because this story playing and storytelling has become the curriculum of any classroom in which I am the teacher. Somewhere in each fantasy is a lesson that promises to lead me to questions and commentary, allowing me to glimpse the universal themes that bind together the individual urgencies." (Paley, 1990)

The more I observed the diverse community of storytellers in PKP establish both their individual and collective voice, I wanted to support that feeling in lessons I created for them. I paid attention to the frequency of certain themes coming up in free play, and pulled together any similar threads between the children's real, more personal stories coming from home. I was inspired by the work of educator Vivian Paley, and her beliefs in the power of storytelling in contributing to a child's growth and development. In *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter*, I saw parallels in Paley's vignettes to my classroom observations. I took inspiration in the way she reflected previous teaching practices that didn't serve her students well and approaches she took to build a classroom culture and curriculum that brought out the storyteller in every child. One approach was the use of helicopter storytelling, so that even children who tended to isolate had an entry point into the society of their classmates with a teacher as facilitator. Like Paley, I too saw the potential in carefully considering what's going on in children's play stories, as it would work to me and Mrs. Parandian's benefit in lesson planning.

STORYTELLING & PLAY teacher-facilitated, child-made



Across the 2s program and PKP, something I knew to be true was these play stories weren't possible if not for teacher-facilitated spaces well equipped with a range of materials for child-made scenes that support their play narratives. Play stations that prompt the child's imagination including toys, blocks, puppets, art materials, and things in nature could be interchangeable, transformed entirely by the children. These areas may also stay the exact same to serve a specific purpose- as we will see in these next slides. These child-made scenes give support to a child's story, or if not already with a plan or story in mind, spark the possibilities of making one.

In the 2s classroom, Debi, Ally and I would set up every morning with materials for the two year olds to set scenes for their play. We used our observational notes of each child to figure out what materials are grounding for them to use, and what materials we could introduce that would best support the stories they were creating in their play. This practice seemed especially helpful for Kallan, who required more time to adjust than the other children. When we managed to gain some insight of the things he took interest in during one-on-one breakthroughs, we made sure those kinds of materials were visible to him. When certain materials we set out garnered a response of collaborative play, we leaned into that and planned how to make it better the next time.

In PKP, Mrs. Parandian also made sure children had access to art materials, manipulatives, and play stations that enabled imagination. Each area was designated with materials that prompted different kinds of play stories to arise. Legos, wood blocks and manipulatives to build, a kitchenette with home items, babies, and puppets, a writing center filled with books and drawing materials, and dollhouses. As the children navigated how to use these centers independently for their play, they were observant of how peers played and used materials. It was as if they were gaging to see which play-stories matched their own or were totally different but intrigued them. Eventually, students started making elaborate child-made scenes together for collaborative, imaginative play stories.



STORYTELLING & PLAY
**play-based learning past
early childhood
to keep imagination**

KEY IDEAS

- make room for the play-based learning that developed a love of storytelling past early childhood
- even more so after children start reading and writing on their own, they need organic storytelling through play to keep their imagination alive

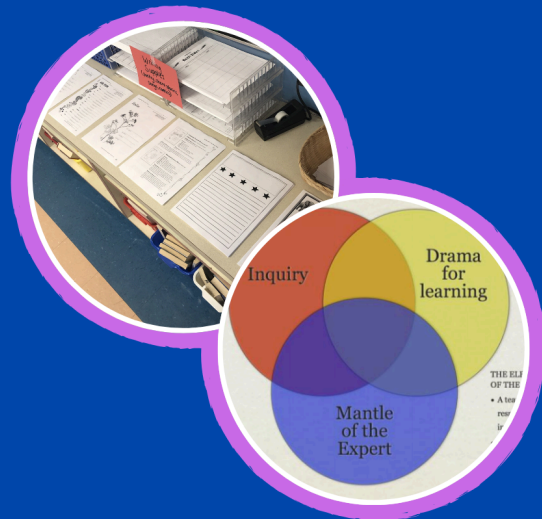
As we do our best as educators to foster a love of storytelling in the early years through play and oral sharing, it's imperative we make room for the play-based learning that developed that love past early childhood. There shouldn't be any shift when we recognize the value in original storytelling and nurturing unique voices in young children, and what it would continue to do for older children's development in a world of curriculum that can be devoid of creativity. Continuing organic stories from older children through play, even more so as they start reading and writing on their own, is crucial in keeping the confidence of using their imagination for storytelling alive.



Play and storytelling is deeply rooted in the arts, as clever uses of the visual and dramatic arts is how children start out in the classroom as storytellers. As a student and human being in society who has felt the positive and healing impact of the arts, I don't want to lose sight of what it can do for my students and their stories. I want to expand on what the kids already know how to do, introduce styles that would best support who they are as a storyteller, and show them where they can apply dramatic or visual elements into their stories. There are plenty of children who enjoy writing and sharing more traditional recipes of stories in a morning journal. However, it's important to differentiate and give options to students who might know how to write down a story but are bored of doing it that way or don't feel like a confident writer. Without arts as an alternative means of showcasing a student's voice, we silence and lose out on seeing the storytellers that make up our classroom because they weren't given a spotlight to shine.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS drama, scripts & improvisation

"The teacher and students evolve a sequence of episodes, not based on plot and subtext as for a script, but on context and curriculum. The mantle of the expert episodes must be faithful to both, as clean and lean as any densely made play."
(Heathcote & Bolton, 1995)



As we saw with stories that arose from imaginative play, naturally there are theatrical aspects in the sharing process of a story. Changing tone of voice to fit the mood, using different voices or accents to distinguish narrator and characters, adding animated physicality- theater's presence is strong in storytelling. The classroom should be an open stage for students who could thrive with the use of drama to create and perform their stories. Providing this as an option in ELA workshops, and then equipping students with developmentally appropriate resources of how to write a script or how to improv with a string of story prompts can be invigorating for the students and teacher.

During my semester as a theater third, I was able to learn about teaching artists and their work in civic engagement. Augusto Boal and Dorothy Heathcote shared similar visions of how theater and performance art can be a restorative practice to the oppressed in taking back their power. This can be achieved utilizing drama-based learning educational approaches like Heathcote's. The Mantle of the Expert is where the teacher and students collaborate by researching important roles in working society, and creating a script or a series of prompts to improvise and model a real-world scenario. What then occurs is appointing children to assume the role of experts, and they perform what's been planned to picture themselves in positions that have importance and power.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS civic engagement at school 9



GROUP 3 SCENE (3 people) - "SOMETHING BROKE" PHYSICAL

- Create a silent scene where you can only say one sentence but the rest of the piece is physical. Something broke and you two are trying to fix it. Communicate to each other what that machine is.
- IDEA: You all work at an ice cream shop. You pull down the handle of the soft serve machine and it doesn't go back up.

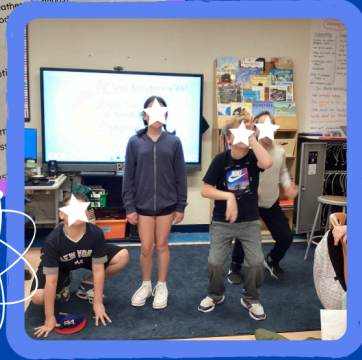
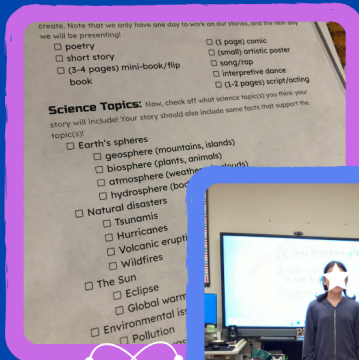


In the civic engagement work I did with Allen Lang at School 9, I experimented with bite-sized versions of these drama-based learning approaches. We went into this school with the hope that our work could inspire sixth graders as not just talented performers, but to become a community with stories that should be heard. They were cast in the school's production of the Lion King, and what we saw right away was these kids were talented and quick-witted, but didn't normally have the spaces to artistically express themselves. They rarely used these talents outside of time they spent with us. Knowing that, my group designed theater games molded around the kids' interests and strengths, using topics that were relevant to them and they brought to our attention in the co-creating process of these games. For example, one Friday we led an improv exercise where the sixth graders, in groups, had to act out the same exact story prompt about being a bystander or a good person in the wake of bullying. Another day, we did improv scenes in groups using prompts that challenged sixth graders to convey a story with little to no words and mostly physicality.

I thought a lot about the valuable skills coming from theater and performance shining through for these kids. Teamwork in an ensemble, projecting your voice or other times just using physicality to mime a story, having fun with unique style and multiple voices- if these were being exercised in a classroom setting, for all sixth graders and not just the select few I worked with, it wouldn't just benefit their confidence in performing but would enhance their overall learning experience. The civic engagement work we did with School 9 was special, as we would end each day accomplishing our hopes of building a community of storytellers empowered by us and their peers. The hope was they kept creating and performing stories meaningful to them.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS

5W's storytelling in science plays



The benefits that came from making space for upper elementary students to engage in innovative storytelling through performance stuck with me. Particularly, the feeling of making stories within a community. Building off strengths, considering similar and dissimilar perspectives, problem-solving issues that arise, enjoying the process- all for the sake of wanting to convey the intended message we set out for in our stories. For Storytelling in Science, where I had to work within the confines of time constraints and incorporate parts of the 5th grade curriculum, I gave students the option to write their own script independently using topics they've covered in science and then act it out with peers.

This clip was one of the three short scripted plays students in 5W made for Storytelling in Science. These fifth graders that chose writing scripts only had two hours the day prior to generate a story using topics like volcanoes, light pollution, and species population decline as prompts and ran wild with it. They enjoyed being able to choose this as their mode of storytelling and performing in front of their supportive class.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS
*sharing their stories
through song & dance*



**"The arts make it possible for all children, regardless of their differences, to participate fully in the process of education."
(Gallas, 1994)**

With or without a prompt, students can share parts of who they are at home and culturally through storytelling involving the use of song and dance. This quote from Karen Gallas' book, *Languages of Learning*, captures practices and pedagogical beliefs where arts is at the forefront for supporting students' storytelling, language development, and participation in their education. As I shared in my recollection, teachers facilitated the classroom as a safe space for me to share my personal stories and feelings through song. I also started to make songs inspired by what I was reading and learning in school across all subjects. In 5W, the fifth graders who showed disinterest or were not as confident to write and read their stories out loud in a journal, I saw that they loved to sing, dance and share music with their friends. When I gave the option to create a song or rap for Storytelling in Science, they hopped on the opportunity.

While we can see at times this student was a little embarrassed, he was still brave enough to try making an original rap about the solar eclipse and going forward with performing it to his class. He'd never done this before. What's important is that this was accepted by me and his teacher as original work that showed an understanding of a topic while maintaining original voice.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS

embrace visual storytelling

teachers embracing visual storytelling as stories, art and language for children to express themselves, culture

drawn/digital/mixed art piece, sculpting, comics, flip-books, photography, videos

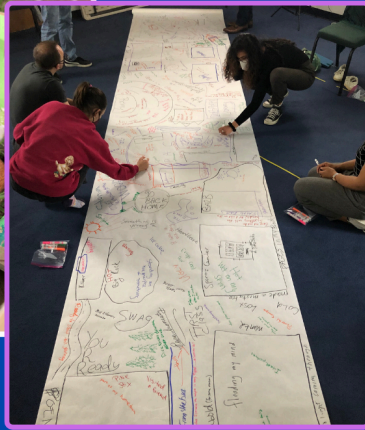
visual arts is an entry point to see children depict their ideas, who they are, and understand what they are learning with ease

visual storytelling as an inclusive practice for multilingual children

In addition to dramatic arts and music for storytellers- teachers should embrace visual storytelling as an art and language for students to express themselves. Visual storytelling can be especially vital when thinking about multilingual children and inclusive practices that allow them to remain a large part of the class community. Giving agency where they can choose visual storytelling and take risks with incorporating their dominant language into their art is how we make those storytellers visible.

If we are teaching our students that book illustrations support stories, or even have the ability of telling a story greater than what written words read aloud can do, then we have to view children's visual storytelling with similar thinking. Getting to know the students in PKP and 5W, I learned that there were many children who, when engaging in visual arts, can depict with ease their ideas, who they are, and understand what they are learning. While not every artist was introverted, as some had no hesitation in vocalizing things they've created to others, teachers and students got to see a side of a child who would normally freeze and shy away when asked to orally share their stories.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS
exposure & use of art
mediums for stories



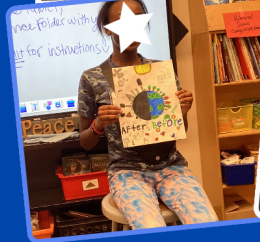
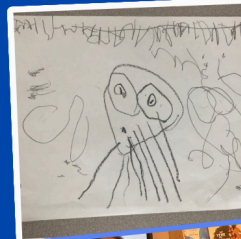
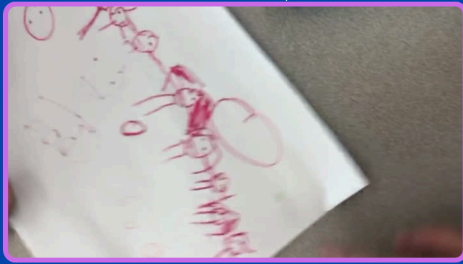
"Artists are reshaping, reclaiming, and reframing stories, both personal and communal, along with the information those stories may be built around, and taking an active, and in many cases inventive, role in transmitting their versions of stories. **Who gets to tell the story, and through which art form, is in the hands of each and every one of us.**" (Donahue, 2010)

In my own college classes, professors would have classes dedicated to art making and improvising with mixed materials to convey a story I wanted to tell myself or in collaboration with classmates. I took the positive benefits I felt from community-made maps of the Sarah Lawrence campus and in CAPE when using recycled materials to build a play story, and knew I wanted to provide my future students a similar experience in lesson plans.

Observations of children who loved making art, and lessons from my host teachers that had an arts component for an additional entry point inspired visual storytelling projects I developed and led. In pre-k, there was more time during the day dedicated to art projects in the classroom. Jumping to fifth grade, it was no surprise that while Mrs. Williams implemented art in class projects, demands of curriculum and teaching to standards meant that she couldn't spend as much time introducing and exploring with her students types of visual arts they can use to tell stories. It made me think about how by upper elementary, it shouldn't just be art specials where we should be exposing and allowing students to use a variety of art mediums as visual storytelling. This can range from hand drawn, digital, mixed art, sculpting, comics, flip-books, photography, filming and video editing.

In my emergent curriculum course last year, when I read chapters from David Donahue's *Artful Teaching*, I found myself revisiting his ideas and examples of what can happen for children's voice and learning if schools adopted reformed models where arts integration is at the core of curriculum throughout the day. Until schools transform their education models and values, it's important that I learned and experimented with what teachers work around and try to incorporate as much as they can within their own classrooms.

STORYTELLERS & THE ARTS
visual art creates stories
without barriers



Giving student-choice that has visual storytelling as an option for class projects and assignments is in alignment with the Universal Design for Learning framework, so that every student can create, shine and have autonomy in their education without barriers. Here are some additional examples of children's original artwork and the stories behind them, and instances where the incorporation of visual arts in a lesson plan allowed children to tell a specific story using their own unique voice.



Seeing that space in the classroom dedicated for play-based learning and the arts can continue to uplift students as storytellers, teachers have to reflect on what works and doesn't work in terms of support students need in the writing workshop. I feel that the main role as a teacher in the writing workshop is to be the story-supporter. Being the story-supporter means it is not only the teacher's responsibility to maintain student voice, but by pulling from observations, building helpful lessons that show children how they can strengthen that voice. This relationship between storytellers and story-supporters can only work if ethical teaching practices are being used that aim to honor each child for who and where they are, academically and socially. There is no other way- story and ELA writing workshop has to be custom-tailored to the diverse needs of the classroom, what is relevant to them as a whole and individually. I watched my host teachers in this role- aiding and scaffolding their students with their original and personal ideas without posing too much influence that would change or erase the author's voice. They were also incredibly mindful of prompts and activities that really struck a chord with most students, and other times where an activity would have benefitted from more differentiated instruction. It was exciting to work and collaborate with such reflective teachers that held similar values in what the ELA workshop should look like. When I would take the lead during these workshops, I wanted to uphold the strong foundations they established for their community of diverse storytellers. From these experiences, and receiving valuable feedback from the students and host-teachers, it also showed me what I did that was effective and areas I could grow for how I'd facilitate my future workshop.

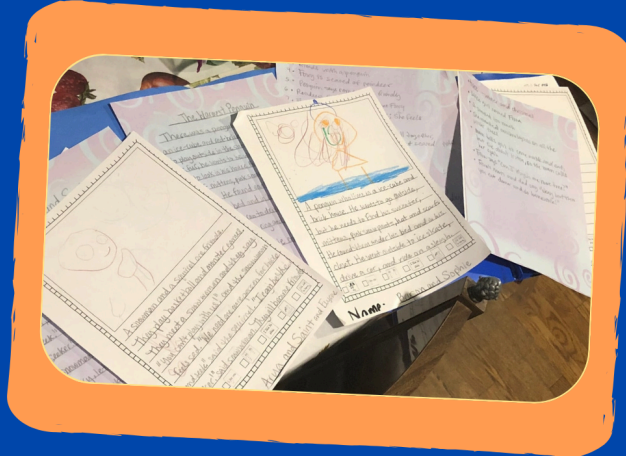
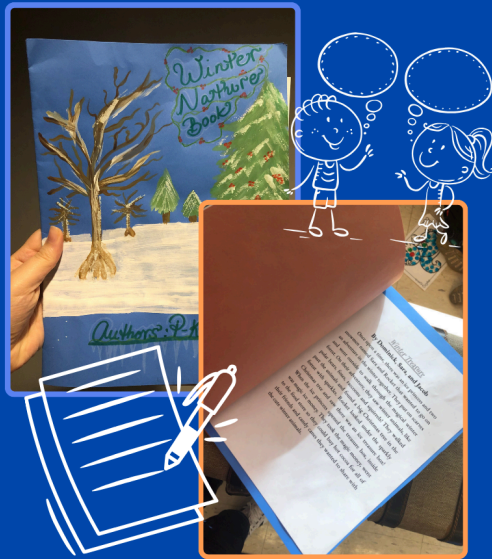
STORY SUPPORTERS
multilingual support in
story making/sharing

"Writing workshop can be a space where children share their experiences, fully engage their linguistic expertise, negotiate social relationships, and author imagined worlds." (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016)



Along with student choice for visual storytelling, support for bilingual and multilingual children in the writer's workshop requires schools and teachers to incorporate students' languages into our curriculum as much as possible. Within a classroom community, when teachers celebrate and use dual language books, media, and in printed materials, and make time for their bilingual students to teach peers new languages with the linguistic expertise they come into school with- we foster the mindset they can openly create and share stories in their dominant languages. Bilingual students should be seen as a fantastic asset to the community at large, as they give all of their classmates a dual-language education. When taking Pamela's class, while English is my first language, I learned a lot about the impact of a classroom library that has bilingual literature and it made me excited to write an original poem book about a nonna's garden in both English and Italian. I'd love to workshop with my future multilingual students original stories, written by them in their languages, and then have that become a child-authored book that has a place within our class library.

STORY SUPPORTERS experience in role of scribe

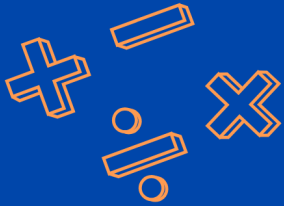


Something I also learned about and want to do often for my students in writing workshops is be a scribe. It is a balancing act of listening to, writing word for word, and at times prompting children's ideas and stories. After the initial oral storytelling, the teacher might add punctuation, organize the order of events, and light paraphrasing if necessary so they read it back to the student with correct tonation and sentence structure. Together, they will workshop changes or additions to give further support to exactly what the child is trying to express in a story. If the child can write, teachers can give them what's been written to continue working on it. Therefore, scribing is beneficial for both early childhood and upper elementary students. When we take on this role for our students, we get to build a valuable relationship where they feel wholly seen and supported by us in their thinking. Without heavily imposing our voices or overcorrecting, we want to show children that they are generating wonderful stories just by speaking out ideas with the help of a scribe.

When I tried my hand at this in PKP, for this particular scenario I was scribing for children who can't yet write in groups of two and three. I gladly took on the task of listening, lightly prompting along, and weaving together multiple ideas for a short story. The process stretched out over two weeks, and with each small group I worked with, it was magical to hear children bouncing off of each other's ideas. Of course at times, some children would inevitably start veering off or talk over each other, or I heard myself imposing more than I should've. It was trial and error I took note of so I can do better for the next group. In the midst of creative and productive chaos, I felt reassured I was doing something right in my work when I got to hear from the children who rarely shared their ideas also had something to incorporate into the story. I was happy to listen and help them get to that point. The end result was deeply gratifying for me as a student-teacher, and I found the children were enamored with the book they created with my help.

STORY SUPPORTERS
interdisciplinary storytelling projects

"Not all children naturally identify their serious musings with the world of science. Somehow for them, science is something mysterious and vague, and their life has nothing to do with the subject. But until a teacher perceives that point of view and works with it, those children remain relatively unable to benefit from science instruction." (Gallas, 1994)



As a story-supporter, I strive to show students that original stories in ELA and writing workshops can fit into math, science, and social studies curriculum. As a teacher, I know how crucial it is for a successful school year to create interdisciplinary lesson plans that always relate back to the lives of students for any kind of concrete learning to take place. This quote from Karen Gallas reminds me of that fact, and there isn't a single lesson I've created or used that wasn't interdisciplinary in some shape or form.

I brought parts of those lessons for course assignments into my fieldwork at School 30 and MAS. I was super passionate about finding where we can give science more time through making the time of day scheduled for ELA workshop interdisciplinary. For pre-k children, doing Winter Stories with them and a culturally responsive recipe book that connected to math and social studies, I knew it'd be beneficial to tap into children's early relationships to food, family and nature as a way to connect with their world. As for the 5th graders- my mission with them was to revitalize interest in science as a subject, as I took note of their dismay for anything involved with prep for the new Science 20 exam coming up. It even visibly affected Mrs. Williams as a teacher who really loves science, as this work was the complete opposite of what science should look like. Storytelling in Science, though it had to be a much shorter lesson, was my way of helping her and her students get a sense of agency in their science curriculum.



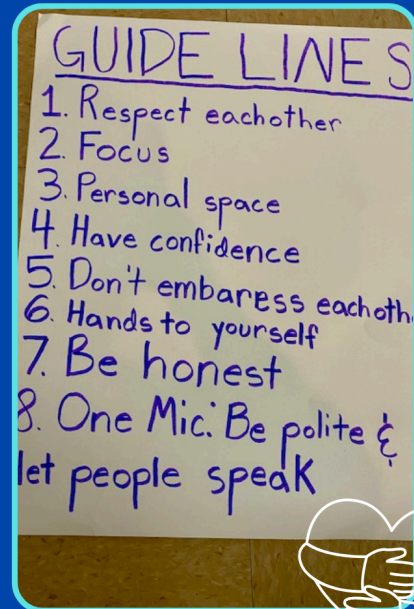
Providing student choice, scribing, multilingual storytelling support, and interdisciplinary learning where original stories have a place are just some of the story-supporter practices that I believe will shine a light on future students in my classroom. Keeping UdL in mind and ideas that were brought forward in Hamel's book about agency in the writer's workshop, from a teaching standpoint, there is so much to consider for teaching to standards, getting assessment, and still somehow creating a responsive curriculum to who my students are.

Receiving student's stories in various styles should be a valued means of teaching assessment that gives me and the child's families a well-rounded archive of original work over the school year. Using project based learning approaches in the writer's workshop that explores the process of developing stories or retellings of another story over time can become a deeply special piece of work to a child. These are things I can't forget as I enter the world and realities of teaching, and here is why. When we have to teach or assign work that requires a more specific and structured response, the hope is students can rise to the challenge and still find confidence in adding their own voice because they see I hear them and encourage original self-expression outside of those scenarios.

STORYTELLERS & BELONGING
a safe space to create & share

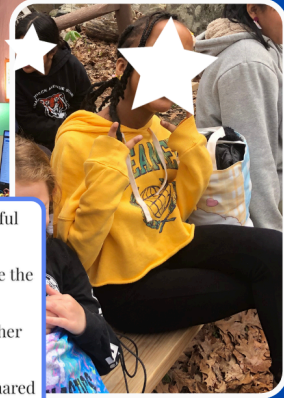
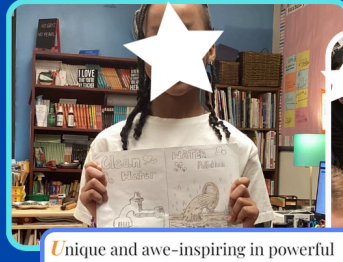
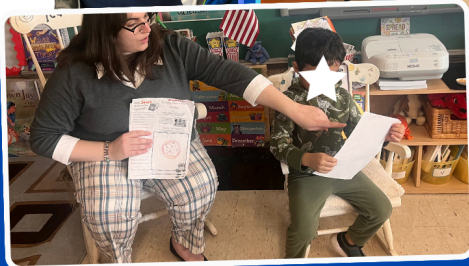


- co-creating community norms with students
- community norms for sharing original and personal stories
- knowing & modeling to students where to step in as facilitators of the story sharing process



These main points and anecdotes all overlap and bring us to the bigger picture of my presentation today- students as storytellers contribute to their sense of belonging. I want to co-create with my students class community norms for sharing original and personal stories so that everyone can be seen, respected and empowered. Knowing where to step in as facilitators of the sharing process is of equal importance, like when to ask questions that help the child explain their story, when it's appropriate to point out what you notice or give feedback, and sometimes detecting when a child wants you to share on their behalf.

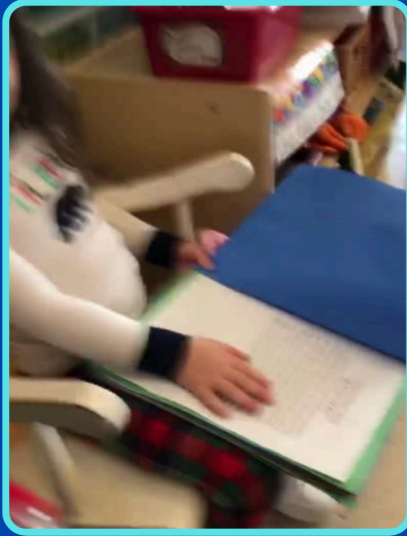
STORYTELLERS & BELONGING
PKP & 5W students anecdote



*U*nique and awe-inspiring in powerful ways.
*C*ompassionate soul that will change the world.
*H*ardworking in anything she's put her mind to.
*E*legant words, always beautifully shared and spoken.

I want to shine a light on two children from my student teaching placements, who I'm naming Kai and Michelle. Getting to know who they are, they've experienced moments where it was hard for them to feel like they were a part of the class community. The projects I got to do in their classes achieved my hopes for the two of them that they will feel encouraged to jump in, create, and share. More than that, I hoped what we did together assured them that their voice is heard and that they belong here.

STORYTELLERS & BELONGING
collab stories with peers



"Children need to be heard and need to hear each other. We teachers can learn from the kinds of questions the young children we teach ask in their homes and communities and use them for teaching." (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016)

Something classrooms should be doing often to foster children's sense of belonging is having them make original stories with their peers. In similar-minded and mixed groups where the strengths of each child can well compliment each other, or sometimes not, exposure to different perspectives and thinking can not only improve their literacy skills, but their interpersonal and social skills. Teachers who frequently have children work in peer groups for collaborative storytelling have the unique opportunity to give prompts that ask children to reflect together on personal experiences. When discussed, it will highlight to them the diversity and similarities amongst each other, all of which have a place in their classroom, school and local communities.

STORYTELLERS & BELONGING
real stories as windows & mirrors

"Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we see our own lives and experiences as a part of the larger human experience." (Bishop, 1990)

What students choose to share with you or each other serves some sort of purpose for that child. It's a special moment, it'd make people laugh, it's a true story but it's how I view it, it helps people see me and where I come from, it's vulnerable for me to share but I feel comfortable doing that here- whatever that purpose may be, we have to honor and be responsive to these real stories. In my future classroom, I can use book read-alouds or tell a personal story of mine to my students so we can model what mindful behaviors are expected of them when the time comes for a student to share. When teachers model how to listen, respect & appropriately respond to students' stories, the sharing process can be transformative for storytellers in connecting and belonging. When personal stories are exchanged between students and teachers in the safe space that is the classroom, they serve our inclusive community as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors like literary works can.

CONCLUSION
closing remarks



"Children don't remember what you try to teach them. They remember what you are." (Henson, 2005)

THANK YOU!

Being a storyteller inspired me to build a philosophy that I can put into practice, where I remain a storyteller and become the spotlight for student's stories as the teacher.

My life and work as a student inspired me to build a philosophy that I can put into practice, where I still remain a storyteller, but now become the spotlight for children's stories as their teacher. I close this presentation with a closing quote from a lifelong inspiration of mine.

I'd like to quickly thank my thesis advisors and mentors- Rue, Emily, and Lorayne. I want to thank the entire Art of Teaching faculty, SLC professors, Diana and WCC professors who all uplifted me in my journey. I could never thank my host teachers Debi, Afsi, and Annie enough. To my AoT cohort- congratulations, it was an honor to learn alongside you to become the educators we wish to see in the world.