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# Storytelling and language development

*Berättandets roll för språkutveckling*

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# Preface

This degree project represents a partial collaboration between Johanna Treble-Read and Janni Wallin (the current author). We have chosen to partly write this degree project together but we have collaborated throughout the whole process. Together we have discussed different texts that we have read but we have written two separate degree projects. We have been approved to work together even if our main subjects are different. Johanna's main topic is Swedish and mine is English. My focus has been on language development as both an ESL and L1 perspective. We have collaborated throughout the whole process and discussed everything that we have read even if we have done two separate projects. The interview citations in the results section is my English translation from Swedish interview responses. Despite our collaboration we have decided to write in I form to make it easier for the reader.

# Abstract

The use of Storytelling as a teaching method is on the rise. Yet, not much is known about how the approach affects language development in a foreign language classroom environment.

First I use interviews to examine teacher perceptions and experiences about Storytelling and its effect on language development across a variety of native language teaching contexts. I will also investigate how Storytelling is used and its effects in an ESL (English as a second language) context. Both cases are examined from both teacher directed Storytelling and student directed Storytelling perspectives. My results suggest that teachers have a positive attitude towards Storytelling since they experience that their students benefit from this in their language development and overall motivation in school.

Keywords: ESL, language development, Haven, oral, primary school, Speaker, Storytelling

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# Introduction

The use of Storytelling as a teaching method is on the rise. Yet, not much is known about how the approach affects language development in a foreign language classroom environment (Dawkins & O'Neill 2011; Ghosn 2002; Roney 1996). Roney (1996) defines Storytelling in the following way:

In its most basic form, Storytelling is a process where a person (the teller), using vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery, communicates with the audience who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily through body language and facial expression in an ongoing communication cycle. Storytelling is co-creative and interactive. It is one of the most powerful forms of art/communication known to humans and this explains why it possesses such great potential as a teaching-learning tool.

(pp. 7)

Through the years of my teacher education in Sweden, my experiences with Storytelling have been positive but many times too few. My experience has been that the English subject does not receive enough focus in grades K-3 in the Swedish system. This raises questions as to whether students have sufficient opportunity to develop their English skills and what the teachers' experiences are towards the effectiveness of Storytelling. At my partner school, I have seen how many of our supervisors have worked with Storytelling and how the children many times appreciate it. After several rounds of verksamhetsförlagd utbildning (Practicum's), I have seen that students are willing to work with Storytelling, and that they are often more positive towards Storytelling than towards traditional learning materials.

As is commonly known, children who cannot themselves read find joy in looking at the pictures in the books and express themselves from what they can see. Although these students are not able to read the book, they can still explain what the book is all about just by looking at the pictures and interpreting individual words. This could be taken as an indication that Storytelling promotes spoken language skills. In fact, a theoretical argument put forth by Sundmark (2014) is that understanding orally told stories is a huge cognitive challenge for children; in fact, one of the biggest we face in our lives. Since we are challenged to understand a picture, we must be able to put it in context and link it to our reality. Furthermore, he writes that it is a crucial step for actual reading and language development.

Sundmark (2014) and Remi (2011) both point out that teachers and students telling stories to each other can be useful with regard to both young children (0-6) and older children.

Language development is clearly an essential part of a student's schooling. As the curriculum for English in Sweden states:

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Having knowledge of several languages can provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts and greater understanding of different ways of living. The English language surrounds us in our daily lives and is used in such diverse areas as politics, education and economics. Knowledge of English thus increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life.

(Skolverket 2011, pp.32)

As Sundmark (2014) and Remi (2011) both suggest, Storytelling in schools is a potential means of helping students to increase their language skills and to thus develop in accordance with the national directives. In the current study, I will use interviews to examine teacher perceptions of and experiences with Storytelling as a classroom teaching methodology and its effect on language development in the Swedish school system.

# Purpose and research question

The Swedish curriculum states that school should encourage all students' lifelong desire to learn and develop (Skolverket, 2011). One of many ways of accomplishing this is through the use of Storytelling. Hence, I want to interview working teachers so that we can take part of their experiences and their opinions regarding this development. This development occurs regardless of which language you speak or want to develop.

The purpose of this study is to use interviews to examine teacher perceptions and experiences about Storytelling and its effect on language development in the Swedish school system. I will investigate both the use when the teacher is telling a story but also when students are telling stories.

The research question for this degree project is:

- What are teachers' perceptions and experiences of working with Storytelling as it relates to language development in an L1 and ESL perspective in the Swedish school system?

I examine this question from five different perspectives:

- Language development through Storytelling
- Storytelling through reading out loud
- Adapted reading out loud
- Language development in ESL perspective
- The use of Storytelling in ESL perspective

# Literature Review

For the purposes of this study Roney's (1996) definition of "Storytelling" was used. In that definition (see above), he promotes the effectiveness of Storytelling as a teaching method. Furthermore, he points out that narration is the base of communication and therefore a natural form in a social context between humans where you both give information and receive it.

## Studies made on the subject Storytelling

In this literature review I will discuss research that has been made on the subject Storytelling and its effects on language development both on the L1 perspective but also ESL. I will discuss different studies that have been made in the subject and how it can benefit language development. In this section I will discuss both first-hand research and sub categories of research.

Across cultures, children bring various types of stories and experiences with them to school. Dawkins and O'Neill (2011) believe that we as teachers should benefit from these stories and make use of them, since teaching becomes meaningful to the students when it is based on their own interests and experiences. From the socio-cultural perspective, we see that language development is dependent on the children's previous reading experiences and their ability to be in contact with and process the literature, and to internalize literary purposes, substances and structures (Dawkins & O'Neill 2011).

Further on Combs and Beach (1994) argues that the power of a story is all around us and is essential in helping the students to understand the reality. As we work with students who are trying to understand this rapidly changing world, we need to use familiar material and stories to capture their attention and help them feel comfortable enough to have the courage to be involved in their learning. Storytelling can offer a context that is familiar to the students and therefore it supports their learning and language development both in an ESL- and L1-perspective. Here they quote:

Children encounter a global perspective when they hear or tell stories about people in all parts of the world who do things each day that are similar to things in their lives. A global perspective is also reinforced with stories about the impact of past societies on our own lives or the impact over people's presence on an environment over time.

(pp. 466)

Haven (2007) claims that we are all born with an understanding of the structure found in Storytelling. It is the most natural communication mindset for us humans and regardless of profession and position in life, we all benefit from mastering this. Furthermore, Haven claims that Storytelling is a universal language that we all understand. Speaker (2000) also states that it is important to make clear to students how the Storytelling structure is built to guide them when they make their own narratives. As a teacher, it is important to give the students a feeling for stories and Storytelling, as well as how these stories may take shape. According to Abilock (2008), very young children benefit from Storytelling since they use story elements to understand their world and the actions of others. Ghosn (2002) also states that children are naturally drawn to stories because they are involved with the text and therefore learn how to connect text with action. Abilock states that “Each of your students is a born storyteller, shaping the raw data of everyday experience into stories that give meaning to life” (2008, pp 8).

Ahrens (2011) and Fast (2014) state the importance of Storytelling for children. To increase the child's vocabulary it is positive to start reading to the child at an early age. By reading and telling stories to children their vocabulary increases, which they may benefit from when telling a story to someone else.

Working with Storytelling provides opportunities to speak with the students - something every teacher should take opportunity of. This is a way for the teacher to see every student. Discussing with the students will also develop their oral language skills (Ghosn 2002). Hence teachers can get an insight into what students actually know when their interests are accounted for. From this, teachers can also see what they need to develop. According to Abilock (2008), students can surprise language-wise when you look to their interests.

Further on Abilock (2008) argues that we as teachers have to see every individual's needs. She believes that it is essential to adapt existing material so that it suits you as a teacher and the student group you are teaching. However, it is not just about individualized instruction and seeing each individual in the classroom. According to Abilock, it is as much about seeing yourself in the material that is used and that is represented. Ghosn (2002) argues that Storytelling is a form of education that should be the basis of language teaching regardless if it is of an L1 or ESL perspective. She writes that Storytelling promotes a natural form of language development that many children find easy to assimilate, whether they are told a story or are telling one. Further, she writes that the same story can captivate different ages

depending on how you choose to work with it and how long it is used in class. Ghosn argues that one can motivate students differently with similar means, making it easier for teachers if they are familiar with the material. As a teacher, you can use the same material at different teaching opportunities in different classes and thus get to know the material and be safe in making use of it. When teachers are confident in their teaching materials, students also become safe and secure in their teaching. Furthermore, Ghosn argues that the material choices you make as a teacher, needs to be done carefully and from a didactic stand. Fiction is often chosen because it seems fun, rather than from a language development perspective.

Speaker (2000) writes that practicing Storytelling may increase students' language development. Moreover, students who have access to Storytelling in terms of being told a story or telling a story, show an increased ability to listen actively for longer periods during the school day. They also show improved listening skills, and they are more likely to retell what they have heard. Students who are often taught through Storytelling also have a better understanding of how Storytelling and narratives are structured: with a beginning, a clear action and an end. Finally, it has been shown that these students have learned to predict the narration and produce a flow in their own writing.

Bruce's (2014) claim is that you can work with narration wherever you are, and make various scenarios interesting and alive for the children when you tell a story to the students. Having an adult listening along to students telling a story allows students to guide other students through the story. Thus all children have a chance to be both seen and heard by teachers and classmates. Riddersporre (2014) writes that children learn a lot by telling, but also by listening. Fast (2014) make a similar claim, that it is important to have an adult who can guide the children in their language development. Furthermore, Ghosn (2002) states that Young ESL learners can be motivated to experience oral language through Storytelling.

## Experimental evidence for the effectiveness of Storytelling

In this section I will look at experimental evidence. Chaudron (1988) focuses on teacher talk and on student behavior and interaction in the classroom. He also focuses on the interactions between teachers and the ESL learners. No matter what method is used, Chaudron argues that the most important thing with the research is to produce descriptions of classroom events and the relationships that occurs, since studies like this are very important for teachers, learners and learning.

In a study by Speaker (2000) teacher students were given the opportunity to connect with elementary students. The elementary school was invited to campus to become an audience for Storytelling presented by the college students. The college students became more secure in their ability to teach and use the techniques to improve the students' cognitive abilities. The younger students found the experience positive and they indicated a growing interest in reading as a result of this interaction. Their study provides evidence that students who are frequently exposed to stories develop their oral language more easily than those who are not. Furthermore, this exposure also helps them to attain a higher level of language proficiency. Students, who are active participants in their language learning, learn in a social context, while they are interacting with other students and adults.

Psycholinguists define reading as an active process based on this interaction that is simultaneously creative and predictive. Predictive-creative thinking is demanded of an audience when they mentally participate in the construction of a story while listening to the tale.

(Speaker 2000, pp. 185).

Furthermore, Speaker (2000) states that there is evidence concerning the positive aspects of Storytelling. Students and teachers should be encouraged to use Storytelling in the teaching both from an ESL and L1 (first language) perspective. Skolverket (2011) argues that students shall be given the opportunities to develop their language in correct school context; this shall be addressed regardless of which language (first or second) you are supposed to develop.

Groce (2004) also conducted a study in this area. In the study, teachers described their experiences with Storytelling for second language learners. The teachers that participated got one-day training in how to implement Storytelling. Storytelling was found to be positive for language learning, the students were more motivated to listen and engage in the lessons and the teachers could see that their reading skills were improved.

A study by Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004) was conducted to determine how Storytelling influences first language development. In the study, two groups of students got to hear the same 24 stories. One of the groups heard the stories told, and the other group heard the stories read from a book. The language samples were transcribed and analyzed. The results from this study showed that results from both Storytelling and story reading were found positive when it came to developing oral language skills. They could also see differences between the two different methods used. Young students who heard stories told orally showed improved comprehension in their retelling, while the students who were read to show improved language complexity.

# Methodology

It was not possible to measure language development through examinations or tests for this project; therefore, I decided to gather my data through interviews. When I conducted the interviews, I chose to leave open the question about who is telling the story (teachers or students) to allow for a broader view, and because I did not want one method to be influenced by my questions.

## Participants

In order to investigate my research question, I chose to interview four teachers who teach in grades K-3 from four different schools in two different communities in southern Sweden. The teachers I interviewed teach in several subjects including English. All of the interviewed teachers have fictitious names in my text.

I interviewed Pär Jönsson on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Pär is 55 years old and has been a teacher for 20 years. He is allowed to teach in the grades 1-7 and he is currently working in a third grade.

On February 4, I interviewed Tuva Svensson. She is 42 years old and has soon worked as a teacher for 20 years. Tuva is a primary teacher and qualified in primary school. Currently she is a class teacher in second grade.

On February 12, I interviewed Lotta Björk: a 45 year-old primary school teacher who has been working for about 20 years. Lotta is competent from first class up to seventh grade and is currently working as a teacher in third grade.

Catja Hasselgren was interviewed February 16, she is 30 years old and has been an active teacher for over six years. Catja's education is from pre-school up to fifth grade. She is currently working in a fourth grade.

One of the teachers that I should have interviewed became ill and I had to find a new solution. I sent my questions to another teacher by e-mail, and received the answers in written form. These answers were shorter than the answers in the interviews, but they contained enough information for me to interpret it.

## Materials

Alvehus (2013) speaks of various interview strategies and how they can influence what type of interview you want to do. The strategy that I have chosen to use is the one he calls a homogeneous sample, where you are interviewing the same type of interview subjects - in this case, F-3 teachers. I have chosen this method, even if Alvehus argues for a heterogeneous selection for qualitative interviews, since it gives you a broader insight to what is to be studied. Nevertheless, considering my research question and what I want to answer, I chose to have a homogeneous selection since it might be easier to draw parallels between the different interviews. I have worked from one main idea, I have proceeded to narrow it down and from that derived the questions and follow-up questions (see appendix 2) that would us answer our research question. The questions I asked were about the teachers' experiences and their views on effectiveness of Storytelling for language development. I also included questions that targeted the teachers' experiences and views on Storytelling and how it can be effective for language development both in L1 and ESL perspective (English as a Second Language).The teachers that I interviewed do not only teach ESL, they teach other language classes as well.

## Procedure

When I conducted the interviews, I chose to record them instead of taking notes during the interviews, since taking notes simultaneously as listening took far too much time. If I were to interrupt the interviews continuously to write down their answers, the flow of the conversation would be lost. I recorded everything they said and the interviews were then transcribed. The interviews were all conducted in Swedish, since that was the first language of the interviewees and the answers would have more nuances if they could freely express themselves in that.

# Result and discussion

In order to analyze and interpret the results from the four interviews, I compiled all responses and then categorized the results into four different thematic groupings: Language development through Storytelling, Storytelling through reading aloud, adapted Storytelling, ESL and Storytelling. Each category is discussed in turn below.

## Language development through Storytelling

Throughout the whole interview, Pär emphasizes the importance of letting the students share their experiences with the whole class. He believes that it makes teaching more meaningful for the students if they feel included and that it promotes language development.

Pär is very accurate about the meaning of words. He finds it very important to discuss a word's meaning with the students to develop their oral language. He thinks that the more words you know, the easier it is to express yourself in different contexts. Catja too stresses the importance of stopping while reading to discuss words that can be difficult to the students. She finds that it develops the students' language to explain words in context. Pär argues in his interview:

But everyone working with texts will help to develop their language, their thinking because we dress the thoughts into words. And the more words they know the more thinking develops, and the same thing with their speaking. The larger the vocabulary you have, the easier it is to explain or tell something to someone. I think I am developing children's language through discussing texts in this way.

Catja argues that it is important to use correct language when speaking with students. She finds it very important to use a "school language" so that the students hear the most suitable words. She finds it important to use correct language, since they are expected to learn it eventually. Catja says "I also think that they should hear a "school language" live. Not just reading but receiving it from two channels".

In the interview with Pär, he talks about the importance of talking about the texts that you are using, because he thinks it gives the students a greater understanding of a story when you talk about it in its context. When you are having these discussions about the stories, you can explain words for the students that may be new or difficult for them to understand. He thinks

this develops language since the students gain a better understanding of the story and its' context. However, Catja's experience is that if the students have heard the word in another context before, they find it easier to learn new language content.

According to Lotta, Storytelling contributes with calm moments that offer the student opportunities to listen and develop their L1 language. Furthermore, she speaks about how Storytelling can be helpful when it comes to understanding the structure of a story.

All the teachers who participated in our interviews agreed that Storytelling in all its' forms are positive for language development. Even in cases where the listening comprehension skills are challenged in terms of concentration difficulties. These difficulties may arise since many students in the grades K-3 are not used to sitting still and concentrating for longer periods. Lotta believes that Storytelling leads to language development as long as it is clear and captivates those students who need to be stimulated. According to Lotta, when students are challenged they develop at the same time when they hear and tell stories. If you make the students aware of when they have succeeded and that they are developing, you will open new doors and possibilities for future language development, both in an ESL and L1 perspective.

Lotta mentions in her interview a few things that she sees as positive for language development:

I just think there are advantages with Storytelling for children. One can work with language in many different ways. So, some positive things: it's quiet moments, you hear a whole story, learning new words, meanings, expressions. You get to hear how a story is constructed. They train their listening comprehension, which many children also need to practice today. They also train to manage listening. You create your own pictures inside your head. What do the figures in the book look like? As it's also learning, to create their own. You learn to predict how it will be in the story. Also, you learn to summarize the story, what happened in the beginning and how was the document and how it ends? Also, it helps then when they are writing or telling stories.

Tuva in turn says in the interview:

Storytelling has existed in all times. A fantastic method to bring info [rmation] on. [...] I work actively with narrative [and] often initiate different work with Storytelling. It works in all substances. If it's personal, it captivates.

There are therefore, according to our interviewees, clear advantages of having a narrative teaching and daring to be personal. Both in terms of your own role as a teacher, as well as allowing students to be personal in their Storytelling.

## Storytelling through reading out loud

Pär states that Storytelling is the foundation of everything you do in school. Especially when working with the younger students. He thinks that it is very important to use Storytelling, no matter what you are teaching. Pär argues:

It is vitally important to add narration whatever you work with in Swedish, social science; in all subjects it is important. Partly to introduce them to work, to create interest and to give them facts or a background. So, I think Storytelling for these ages is very important, because they are beginners in terms of reading.

He uses Storytelling to start the class. Then Pär gives them facts about something. Since the students may not be fluent readers, it may be easier to hear the information than to be given a written instruction.

Tuva emphasizes the importance of using Storytelling when introducing a new theme or task. Her experience is that students find Storytelling very fascinating. When she is giving instructions or information, students learn how to give instructions themselves and how to interpret them properly. This is supported by Abilock (2008), who states through Storytelling instructions can be differentiated and therefore suit all students' needs. Since Storytelling is not a forced teaching method and can be adapted after the students' interests, it will feel more natural for them.

Lotta states that it is through reading aloud that you reach your students, both the ones that learn languages easily and the students who need extra support. Lotta says "They train their listening comprehension, which many children also need to practice today".

This is evidenced by Riddersporre (2014), who writes that children learn a lot by telling, but also by listening. It is also supported by Fast (2014) who emphasizes that it is important to have a linguistic connection with an adult who can guide children in their language development. It is further strengthened by Speaker (2000), who writes that during the school

day, pupils often listen to Storytelling and partake of educational Storytelling, which gives a greater language development, allowing them to concentrate for longer periods.

By having a book that you read aloud from in your class, you create a connection and help the students to have something to talk about when they discuss the literature. This in turn benefits them in their language development. Speaker (2000) points out that children, who regularly get to listen to more complex and sophisticated Storytelling, may also become more complex and advanced in their language development than children who do not regularly get to listen to stories. In addition, Ghosn (2000) mentions that students are motivated by the experiences surrounding the narrative and to have the opportunity to self-develop the oral language through stories and Storytelling.

When interviewing Catja, she points out the importance of letting the students read and tell each other information, since students who learn in a social context learn from each other while they are interacting with other students and adults. Speaker (2000) states the importance of students learning in a social context and among other student or adults. This was something that all of the teachers that we interviewed agreed on. Through listening to more experienced speakers, students learn new words more easily both when it comes to listening to adults but also to other students. It is in the social context that you can be the silent one, observing until you feel comfortable enough to speak and be a part of the social group.

## Adapted Storytelling

Björk, one of the interviewed teachers, states that she adapts her language to what the students are supposed to learn. I interpret this as language and Storytelling becoming natural for students, as well as gaining a rich and varied language. I believe that this gives them the opportunity to be a part of the meeting between languages, society and cultures which Skolverket (2011) states that they shall be.

Lotta talks about how she adapts her language based on the group of students she teaches. In the interview, Lotta says:

As for reading aloud, it must work in different ways. Sometimes I have a text or a book to read aloud and then it may not be too many interruptions because then you break this mystery. But you can certainly interrupt to explain words so you know that all children keep up with the action.

Lotta chooses to replace words if they are inappropriate, old-fashioned, foreign or simply too advanced. Abilock (2008) argues that one can see and reach every individual's needs and desires by differentiated teaching through fiction. Storytelling is not a forced form of teaching but comes naturally in teaching and facilitates language development as well as learning for the students. According to Ghosn (2002), Storytelling should be the basis of language teaching since it promotes a form of language development that is natural for the students. The students may find this type of teaching easier to assimilate. The same story can captivate different ages depending on how you choose to work with it and how long you choose to work with it. She means that if the students are familiar with the material they are more likely to be motivated.

Lotta points out that she sometimes chooses to explain the words, but that she is careful not to disrupt when she is reading aloud, since she wants to maintain the mystery that reading aloud can have. Foreign words, one can explain to students on so many other occasions, according to Lotta. Catja also states "I see a lot of advantages to narrative teaching. If there are words students do not understand or things that I want to reinforce, I'm the "boss" of the material and can jump, stop and work as I want". She makes sure that she takes every opportunity to develop the students' language.

Lotta, Tuva, Catja and Pär stress the importance of making the reading more alive to the students. They all use different voices and sounds to make the reading more lively and interesting for the students. Tuva says "I try to vary my reading, body language, tone of voice and props to invite the students". They all think that the student are more active during the reading when they use these different sounds and voices, because they say that they can stop reading and ask for something in the text just to check that they are listening. However, Pär can also see a difficulty with this if a story has too many characters. It may then become difficult for the teacher to remember the different voices, as well as confusing and hard to remember all the different characters for the students.

Pär also brings up the difficulty with Storytelling when there is a great variation of the reading ability in a class. Teachers have to see to every individual's needs. This is something that every teacher who is using Storytelling does, according to Abilock (2008). She believes that it is all about adapting existing material so that it suits you as a teacher and the student group you are teaching. Storytelling may suit everyone who cannot read but it can become problematic for those students whose listening comprehension is lacking. In addition, Lotta

emphasizes that it is important to practice listening comprehension since it provides great possibilities for language development.

When interviewing Pär, he frequently mentioned how the students were willing to share their own experiences. This is similar to what Dawkins and O'Neill (2011) bring up, that teachers should benefit from the stories and experiences that students bring to school. Listening to these stories makes the teaching more meaningful to the students, since it is based on their own interests. When students are willing to share their stories and have an interest in what they are sharing, they become sustained and motivated. In this willingness to share, students can learn from each other by showing interest and asking questions of one another. In this way students' curiosity is awakened and a dialogue will take form. In addition, Tuva addresses her experiences of how students are captured by personal stories and that they are willing to share their thoughts, experiences and stories most of the time.

## ESL and Storytelling

Pär and Tuva find Storytelling important since the students often cannot read in English in grades K-3. Oral instructions then become very important. Once again, Pär states the importance of discussing the meaning of different words to help the students to develop their language. Pär thinks it gives them greater depth of knowledge, if they know the meaning of the word. When speaking with students, it is also important to have a good pronunciation so that the students hear good spoken English. Haven (2007) and Ghosn (2002), who both claim that Storytelling is a language that everyone understands, say that working with Storytelling provides many opportunities where you can speak with the students and thereby develop their oral language skills.

Goshn (2002) states that Storytelling now has a permanent place in the ESL teaching. If you look at all the interviews, they use Storytelling in their everyday teaching, which I think is a positive sign indicating that Storytelling has a permanent place in teaching - both for language development and from an ESL perspective.

Today, Pär experiences a lack of these planning opportunities. "Back in the days you had more discussions about the English teaching, how you were going to do it, what you were going to do and why". Before, they discussed what books to order or games that would develop the students' language. Today, they do not have those discussions about the English subject, something he misses.

Many students find speaking English very embarrassing. Pär experiences the students' lack self-confidence and enough knowledge to speak in front of the class. However, Lotta thinks that if the students get used to hearing good spoken English they will get more confident speaking themselves. Skolverket (2011) states that the students shall be given opportunities to develop their confidence in using the language. They shall be given opportunities to use different strategies to solve problems when their language skills are not sufficient.

Lotta and Catja think that oral language development is very important regarding the young students, since they are not strong readers yet and it makes it easier to speak about something than for them to read it. According to Ghosn (2002), discussing with the students will develop their oral language skills. In the interview with Catja, she mentions that she finds it important to have enough time while reading in English, because if there is a word or a phrase that the students are not familiar with she likes to have the time where she can stop and discuss it with the students.

When teaching English, Pär and Tuva argue the importance of making it fun and interesting for the students. To make teaching with Storytelling more fun, Pär tries to use different voices and sounds to make the stories come alive. Tuva adds "Storytelling has existed in all times. A fantastic method to bring information forward. With just a voice and body language it can captivate most students, especially if what you are saying has a personal connection".

Young ESL learners can be motivated to experience and develop oral language through Storytelling (Gosn 2002). Pär argues this in his interview, for English to become natural, Pär has different English books in the classroom. The students can read and look at the pictures whenever they want, which makes the learning more fun and relaxed for them.

Lotta and Tuva both state that English is intriguing when presented in the right way. In many cases, they have experienced that students find it hard to relax when learning a new language and they are afraid to fail. However, when they give the students the tools to play with the language they no longer seems to be held back for fear of failing. Therefore, when they tell stories and show a relaxed attitude, they capture the students who have been too afraid to try English before.

In Lotta's current class, the students have been so familiarized to English that they have asked for writing tasks and more English lessons. They started saying simple words in English, but now the class starts the day with going through the day in English; something they manage by

themselves. The English language has developed in pace with their increasing courage, and today, the whole class dares to and wants to speak even if it is not correct every time. Lotta is satisfied with this open and accepting classroom, which allows the students to talk, listen and learn from each other. She thinks that it is thanks to their open classroom-policy that they have been able to have this form of teaching and that they will continue in the same way for a continued ESL language development. In addition, Pär argues that “If you look at the self-confidence to want to talk, there is actually a shortage not only in self-confidence but also a lack of knowledge about pronunciation”. Studies confirm that students who are active participants in their language learning, learn in a social context while they are interacting with other students and adults (Speaker 2000). Catja says “Students must always be able ask questions on what I tell so the discussion in the classroom comes alive and I capture students' thoughts there and then”. Therefore, she finds it very important to invite the students to ask questions when she reads aloud. She thinks it makes the teaching come alive when the students can ask questions to what she is reading. This is also an opportunity to check so that all the students are active listeners as she is reading.

Pär thinks it is important to have pictures when telling a story to young students. He thinks it helps the students to understand the story easier and to connect text with picture. He finds it very important when it comes to the students who cannot read themselves.

Lotta argues that children are curious and that they learn very much by listening. Both Abilock (2008) and Ghosn (2002) state the importance of using Storytelling since the students use the story elements to understand their world. If you also work in a varied way, with Storytelling, songs and games, it becomes more fun and interesting for the students. The study made by Chaudron (1988) states the importance of letting the students work in different constellations, such as different groupings or tasks. He thinks this makes the learners take control over their ESL learning, rather than being passive students who are absorbing the teachers' information.

# Conclusion

In this part of the degree project, I will discuss and problematize my result. I will present a conclusion and I will connect it with the purpose and research question. Finally, I will discuss and reflect on the results that I got. I will also discuss my future profession and how this degree project has affected me.

On the basis of the interviews that I have conducted and the literature that I have read, I have come to the conclusion that Storytelling is a useful method for promoting language development, at least in the context of the Swedish school system. All of the teachers agreed that the use Storytelling in their daily teaching has achieved progress in their students' language development. The existing research that I synthesized in the first part of this paper reinforces this. Speaker (2000), Abilock (2008) write about how reading aloud and Storytelling promote language development. Ghosn (2002) argues:

Carefully selected children's literature, however, offers an alternative, motivating medium for foreign language acquisition. Children's literature is defined here narrowly as fiction written for children to read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes. This definition excludes 'basal readers', or 'reading scheme' books, which are developed around controlled vocabulary.

(pp.172)

In the interviews, I saw that teachers not only look at language development during classes where they teach language, but that they see language development during the whole school day. From this one can conclude that language development is not an isolated subject, but a part of everyday life at school that permeates all subjects. The use of language together with other students or adults challenges and develops the language of the context in which the language process takes place (Speaker 2000). Skolverket (2011) states that students should be given opportunities to deal with spoken language in content to own experiences and what is familiar to them, in order to develop their language skills.

Lotta speaks about this in her interview in which she mentions that her students show a faster language development than the students that she previously taught. Today she teaches more in the form of Storytelling and reading strategies since it shows a faster language development. Speaker (2000) writes:

Children involved in Storytelling programs exhibit improved listening skills, better sequencing, abilities increased language apprehension and more thoughtful organization in their own writing. The benefits of becoming familiar with the concept of an oral tradition are numerous.

(pp.184)

Another conclusion is that each teacher has his or her own style when it comes to leading a narrative teaching. One can be more or less creative, but still achieve the same results as long as you are committed and purposeful. With great empathy and creativity, tone and body language can reach students just as well as when you have a calm and structured instruction. Narrative form depends on what the goal of the lesson is. The conclusion concerning this is that you as a teacher can have a different role in the classroom. Through interviews, I have concluded that it is important to be clear and have a good structure when you are telling something. Two of the teachers I interviewed mentioned the difficulty in remembering different voices when reading aloud. I therefore conclude that one must be familiar with the material to be used in formative reading aloud.

In both the literature and the interviews, I learned that a large part of the success of a narrative teaching is to use the right materials. It is not just about the material suiting the group of students to teach, but it is equally important that the material is suitable for the teacher who is teaching. Abilock (2008) argues that it is when the teacher knows the material that he can design the best possible education for the current group.

Ghosn (2002) writes about how students learn through interaction with others. Through a narrative form of teaching, all students' language can be developed on the different levels they are at. Students learn and develop at their own pace in interaction with others. To be in contact with an advanced language does not become negative when the support is in the form of classmates and adults in the classroom.

With these findings in mind, I can see that working with Storytelling for language development is beneficial and rewarding. All of the interviewees talked about their positive experiences in terms of language development and motivation to learn.

From the ESL perspective, I can see that teachers are very positive to Storytelling. Many of them find Storytelling more important when the students are learning a new language. Since the students cannot read, they find Storytelling a good way to introduce a subject. They are

then able to discuss words and meanings that are new to the students instead of them having to read it themselves. This way of teaching promotes students' oral skills (Ghosn, 2002).

It also appears that students are not given sufficient exposure to an instruction in English in grades K-3. The answers from the interviews concerning English were not as long as for the other questions. This is especially notable since it is stated in the syllabus for English that students shall be given opportunities to hear spoken English and experience it through areas that are familiar to them (Skolverket 2011).

Since I chose to interview only four teachers, it could be considered as too few, and the risk could be that we would not get enough answers that I could then compile and analyze. The consequences of only interviewing four teachers can also be that the answers are too much alike, which not give a variety of responses in the results would section - something which happened to us. Many of the teachers agreed with each other, and there was no teacher who stood out. All of the teachers found Storytelling positive to work with, which I found interesting. For this reason, it would have been interesting to hear a teacher who disagreed. I found it difficult to know how many teachers would be enough material for an analysis. However, it was a conscious choice not to have too many interviews, because then I would not have the time to compile and analyze them.

As I look to our future profession and what this study has contributed, I find that I have received so much positive feedback in terms of Storytelling. This is especially encouraging, since this is a type of teaching that I want to work with in the future. I feel secure with a narrative form of teaching because of everything I have read, as well as the interviewees' responses and attitudes to the subject. I have been in contact with enough material to form an idea of how students learn in a natural way when it comes to Storytelling. I also find that this form of education suits all children in their language development, wherever they are in their development.

In the future, it would have been interesting to do further research on this subject. It would have been interesting to do a bigger project, where I could observe and do interviews and then compile the two and see if there are any other aspects that are not shown in the interviews. Furthermore, it would have interesting to compare teaching with relatively little Storytelling with teaching with a lot of Storytelling to see if there is a difference in the students' language development. By designing a lesson and doing observations I think there is a greater opportunity to gather material so that you can draw conclusions that weigh heavier than the

ones I have been able to do through my four interviews. In the future, I would like to add observation to the study to analyze and draw conclusions from. In such a research project, there would also be more time than I have had during our degree project. With more time, I believe that one can access and process a larger amount of material, both in terms of literature, interviews and observations.

Writing this Degree project, I noticed the lack of English in the grades K-3. During the interviews, it has not been difficult to get answers about Storytelling and how it can benefit language development. The difficult thing has been to get long answers about the English questions since that is a small part of the K-3 schooling. Many of the teachers did not have a clear vision for the English subject and the language development for it. They just do the same as they do in the other subjects. They did also feel like the English subject was not prioritized in K-3, something that I can understand in a way, because they need to focus on their first language and math. Still it was not easy to ask for these answers when it was about the ages K-3.

When it came to the ESL-perspective, the teachers found English difficult to teach since the students are at very different levels when it comes to language development. This was interesting to hear because it is not mentioned as much in school that this is difficult for the teachers when it comes to teaching English as a second language.

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# Appendix 1

## Questions

What are your experiences of working with Storytelling in your teaching?

Is Storytelling something that you actively work within your teaching?

Describe how you usually do when you tell in the classroom.

How do you do when you are telling a story or reading aloud? - Do you invite to questions and conversations during reading or are you more a mediator of the text?

When you read aloud, are you inviting the children, do you portray the text or follow the text altogether?

Do you choose the material yourself or do you use finished materials for Storytelling?

How do you as a teacher look at telling for language development?

Do you see any disadvantages and advantages of narrative language development?

## ENGLISH

Is Storytelling used for English language development?

Is Storytelling something you actively work with so pupils can have the opportunity to develop English from an ESL perspective?

According Lgr.11 students should be given opportunities to listen and discover the English language, this is something you think you are doing?