# STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM: OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURAL CUES OF CHILDREN'S STORY EXPERIENCES

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*This thesis is dedicated to*

*my parents*

*Jim and Elaine Morrison,*

*who filled my mind with stories and my childhood with magic*

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS** **PAGE**

Title page .....1
Certificate .....2
Dedication .....3
Acknowledgements .....4
List of Tables .....11
List of Figures .....13
Abstract.....17

**CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS**

**1.1 Our story begins**.....18

**1.2 Background to the current study (or, "How Half-chick got burned.")**.....19

**1.3 The research questions**.....21

**1.3.1 Methodological considerations in the approach to Research**.....21

**1.3.2 Plotting the journey**.....22

**1.3.3 Companions on the journey**.....23

**1.4 Organisation of the thesis**.....24

**1.4.1 Presentation style of the thesis**.....27

**1.5 Conclusion**.....28

**PART I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**.....29

**CHAPTER 2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ABOUT ORAL STORYTELLING, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON CHILD LISTENERS**.....30

**2.1 Definition of terms**.....31

**2.1.1 What is storytelling?** .....31

**2.1.2 Engagement with storytelling**.....31

***2.1.2.1 The sense of story***.....34

***2.1.2.2 Engagement with language***.....36

***2.1.2.3 Receptive audience and engagement***.....37

**2.2 Storytelling as an area of academic study**.....38

**2.2.1 Methodology of previous studies of children's responses to storytelling**.....40

**2.3 Audience preparation and audience behaviour**.....41

**2.3.1 The trance-like state**.....44

**2.3.2 The fourth wall**.....45

**2.3.3 The role of the storyteller**.....46

**2.3.4 Building trust and familiarity**.....47

**2.4 The value of storytelling**.....48

**2.4.1 Storytelling as an activity accessible by all**.....48

**2.4.2 Storytelling requires no pre-requisites**.....49

**2.4.3 Storytelling is an aid to meaning making**.....50

**2.4.4 Innate love of story: The sixth sense**.....52

**2.5 Benefits of storytelling to child listeners**.....55

**2.5.1 Storytelling as an educational tool**.....56

**2.5.2 Listening skills**.....59

**2.5.3 Improving literacy skills**.....61

**2.5.4 Fostering a love of literature**.....64

**2.5.5 Building social skills**.....65

***2.5.5.1 Building a community***.....65

***2.5.5.2 Audience behaviour skills***.....67

***2.5.5.3 Developing skills as social beings***.....68

***2.5.5.4 Storytelling as a tool in values education***.....69

**2.6 The benefits for and of storytelling teachers**.....70

**2.6.1 Making a connection**.....70

**2.6.2 Storytelling to enhance a love of reading and stories**.....72

**2.6.3 Uniting the 'difficult class'**.....72

**2.7 The cognitive benefits of storytelling: Engaging the whole brain**.....73

**2.8 Summary**.....75

**PART II FINDING THE WAY**.....77

**CHAPTER 3. FORGING A RESEARCH METHOD: QUEST (QUERYING UNEXPLORED EXPERIENCES IN STORY TELLING)**.....78

**3.1 QUEST Step One: Open-minded observation**.....79

**3.1.1 Setting out on the QUEST – Unexplored experiences**.....79

**3.1.2 Research design drawn from the research questions**.....80

**3.1.3 Academic rigour**.....83

**3.2 QUEST Step Two: Exploratory research**

**3.2.1 Participants in the current research**.....87

**3.2.2 Stage one: A storytelling research design - Equipping the journey**.....91

**3.2.3 Ethics clearance process**.....91

**3.2.4 Ethics for practising storytellers**.....92

**3.2.5 Story selection and preparation**.....94

***3.2.5.1 The story selection process***.....94

***3.2.5.2 The story preparation process***.....98

**3.2.6 Story presentation for the study**.....101

***3.2.6.1 Room preparation***.....101

***3.2.6.2 Audience preparation and classroom management***.....102

**3.3 QUEST Step Three: Data collection**

**3.3.1 Stage two: A storytelling research design - the storytelling experience in the spotlight**.....107

**3.3.2 The structure of the storytelling programme**.....107

**3.3.3 The importance of familiarity between the teller and the listener**.....108

**3.3.4 Determining the length of project**.....110

**3.4 QUEST Step Four: Reflective practice**

**3.4.1 Challenges in the QUEST process**.....111

**3.5 QUEST Step Five: Critical analysis of data**

**3.5.1 Data analysis**.....120

**3.5.2 Transcribing: "Handling your own rat"**.....121

**3.5.3 What was transcribed?** .....122

**3.6 QUEST Step Six: Data interrogation**

**3.6.1 The coding process and NVivo software: Grounded theory in action**.....125

**3.7 QUEST Step Seven: Investigation of patterns** .....129

**PART III. CLASS JOURNEYS: ON THE ROAD TO THE INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT**.....130

**CHAPTER 4. INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT PART ONE: INDIVIDUAL FAMILIARISATION**.....131

**4.1 Indicators of Engagement: Individual Familiarisation**.....134

**4.2 Entering Story Realm Engagement cluster**.....137

**4.2.1 Sixth Grade (6G)**.....141

**4.2.2 Third Grade (3G)**.....143

**4.2.3 Kindergarten Grade (KG)**.....145

**4.2.4 Outcome of Entering the Story Realm Indicators: Defining story exit indicators**.....148

**4.3 Collaborative Engagement**.....150

**4.3.1 Sixth Grade (6G)**.....153

**4.3.2 Third Grade (3G)**.....159

**4.3.3 Kindergarten Grade (KG)**.....166

**4.3.4 Outcome of Collaborative Engagement**.....169

**4.4 Trancelike State Engagement**.....171

**4.4.1 The key indicators of a trancelike state**.....172

***4.4.1.1 Factors of the storytelling event that facilitate the trancelike state***.....174

***4.4.1.2 Impact of the Chambers/Harley diagram***.....176

**4.4.2 Sixth Grade (6G)**.....177

**4.4.3 Third Grade (3G)**.....180

**4.4.4 Kindergarten Grade (KG)**.....181

**4.4.5 Outcome of Trancelike State Engagement**.....185

**4.5 Summary**.....187

**CHAPTER 5. INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT PART TWO: RELATIONAL EFFECTS**.....189

**5.1 Indicators of Engagement: The Relational Effects strand**.....189

**5.2 Language Engagement**.....191

**5.2.1 Sixth Grade (6G)**.....194

**5.2.2 Third Grade (3G)**.....206

**5.2.3 Kindergarten Grade (KG)**.....213

**5.2.4 Outcome of Language Engagement**.....220

**5.3 Group Dynamics Engagement**.....221

**5.3.1 Sixth Grade (6G)**.....226

**5.3.2 Third Grade (3G)**.....236

**5.3.3 Kindergarten Grade (KG)**.....244

**5.3.4 Outcome of Group Dynamics Engagement**.....251

**5.4 Summary**.....252

**CHAPTER 6. THE JOURNEY CONCLUDES**.....256

## LIST OF REFERENCES


**1. PRIMARY SOURCES**

**1.1 Published sources of stories used during the research storytelling project**.....262

**1.2 Computer software**.....263

**2. SECONDARY SOURCES**

**2.1 Books and pamphlets**.....264

**2.2 Articles, chapters from books and published papers**.....269

**2.3 Newspapers, journals and magazines**.....276

**2.4 Unpublished papers and papers presented at conferences**.....276

**2.5 Unpublished theses**.....277

**3. INTERNET RESOURCES**

**3.1 Web pages**.....277

**3.2 Web logs (Blogs)**.....278


## APPENDICES


**APPENDIX 1. LIST OF TERMS**.....280

**APPENDIX 2. THE CHAMBERS/HARLEY DIAGRAM: WORKED EXAMPLE**.....284

**APPENDIX 3. SCHEDULE OF STORIES FOR THE THREE FOCUS CLASSES**.....286

**APPENDIX 4. LIST OF INDICATORS (CODING NODES) USED THROUGHOUT THE STUDY**.....288

**LIST OF TABLES**


Table 3.1 *Class groups, exposure level and teachers involved in the Research*.....88

Table 3.2 *Inclusion criteria for selected stories*.....95

Table 3.4 *Steps for audience preparation and classroom management*.....103

Table 3.5 *The structure of the storytelling project as analysed in this thesis*.....108

Table 4.4 *Principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators*.....140

Table 4.5 *Table showing occurrences of principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....141

Table 4.8 *Table showing occurrences of principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....143

Table 4.11 *Table showing occurrences of principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for KG*.....145

Table 4.17 *Principal Collaborative Engagement Indicators*.....151

Table 4.18 *Additional Collaborative Engagement Indicators*.....152

Table 4.19 *Table showing occurrences of principal Collaborative Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....153

Table 4.23 *Table showing occurrences of principal Collaborative Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....159

Table 4.28 *Table showing occurrences of principal Collaborative Engagement Indicators for KG*.....166

Table 4.31 *The key indicators of a Trancelike State as derived from the literature*.....172

Table 4.32 *Principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators*.....175

Table 4.33 *Additional Trancelike State Engagement Indicators*.....176

Table 4.34 *Table showing occurrences of principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....177

Table 4.37 *Table showing occurrences of principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....180

Table 4.39 *Table showing occurrences of principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators for KG*.....182

Table 5.3 *Principal Language Engagement Indicators*.....193

Table 5.4 *Table showing occurrences of Language Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....194

Table 5.12 *Table showing occurrences of Language Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....206

Table 5.17 *Table showing occurrences of principal Language Engagement Indicators for KG*.....213

Table 5.22 *Non-verbal signals of liking and dominance*.....223

Table 5.23 *Principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators*.....224

Table 5.24 *Table showing occurrences of principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....226

Table 5.29 *Table showing occurrences of principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....236

Table 5.32 *Table showing occurrences of principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for KG*.....244

**LIST OF FIGURES**


Figure 2.1 *Extract from Field Notes, referring to willingness to participate in the storytelling project*.....58

Figure 2.2 *Examples of children incorporating vocabulary obtained in storytelling sessions into games.*.....64

Figure 3.3 *Participating teachers' feedback regarding the need for classroom intervention*.....103

Figure 3.6 *Extract from Field notes referring to rapport with the school community*.....114

Figure 3.7 *Extract from Field notes referring to flexibility with school activities*.....118

Figure 3.8 *An extract from the research transcript illustrating the transcription markers used*.....124

Figure 4.1 *The Engagement with storytelling process: highlighting in colour – The Individual Familiarisation strand*.....136

Figure 4.2 *Story openings from transcripts*.....138

Figure 4.3 *Entering Story Realm Engagement cluster*.....139

Figure 4.6 *Extract from transcript showing eagerness to Enter Story Realm for 6G*.....141

Figure 4.7 *3-D Chart showing principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....142

Figure 4.9 *3-D Chart showing principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....144

Figure 4.10 *Extract from transcript illustrating determination to Re-enter Story Realm in 3G*.....144

Figure 4.12 *Chart showing principal Entering Story Realm Engagement Indicators for KG*.....146

Figure 4.13 *Extract from transcript showing several indicators grouped together after distraction for KG*.....147
Figure 4.14 *Extract from transcript showing recognition of story endings in KG*.....148
Figure 4.15 *Extract from transcript showing responses to story endings for 6G*.....149
Figure 4.16 *Collaborative Engagement cluster*.....150
Figure 4.20 *Chart showing increase in principal Collaborative Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....154
Figure 4.21 *Extract from transcript showing change in body language in 6G*.....158
Figure 4.22 *Extract from transcript showing effect of smiling on rapport for 6G*.....158
Figure 4.24 *3-D Chart of principal Collaborative Engagement cluster for 3G*.....160
Figure 4.25 *Extract of transcript showing example of Acting indicator in 3G*.....160
Figure 4.26 *Extract from transcripts showing 'ownership' of story for 3G*.....161
Figure 4.27 *Extract from transcript showing effect of immersion in story on Joining in for 3G*.....164
Figure 4.29 *3-D Chart of principal Collaborative Engagement cluster for KG*.....167
Figure 4.30 *Trancelike State Engagement cluster*.....171
Figure 4.35 *3-D Chart showing principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....178

Figure 4.36 *Extract from Field notes showing positive storyteller response in Week Four for 6G*.....178
Figure 4.38 *3-D Chart showing principal Trancelike State Indicators for 3G*.....180
Figure 4.40 *3-D Chart showing principal Trancelike State Engagement Indicators for KG*.....182
Figure 4.41 *Extract from transcript showing combinations of Trancelike State Indicators for KG*.....183
Figure 5.1 *The Engagement with storytelling process: The Relational Effects strand*.....189
Figure 5. 2 *The Language Engagement cluster*.....191
Figure 5.5 *3-D Chart showing principal Language Engagement indicators for 6G*.....195
Figure 5.6 *Extract from transcript illustrating developing interest in language for 6G*.....196
Figure 5.7 *Extract from transcript showing undeveloped individual response to storytelling language in 6G*.....196
Figure 5.8 *Extract from transcript showing critiquing response to story plots in 6G*.....198
Figure 5.9 *Extract from transcripts showing honest opinion of stories*.....200
Figure 5.10 *Extract from transcripts showing recognition of the role of dialogue in storytelling in 6G*.....203
Figure 5.11 *Extract from transcript showing prediction of plot in 6G*.....204
Figure 5.13 *3-D Chart showing principal Language Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....207
Figure 5.14 *Extract from Field notes showing distraction in 3G*.....209
Figure 5.15 *Extract from Field notes showing interaction extension in 3G*.....209
Figure 5.16 *Extract from transcript showing values responses in 3G*.....210

Figure 5.18 *3-D Chart showing principal Language Acquisition Engagement Indicators in KG*.....214
Figure 5.19 *Extract from transcript showing interaction extension by Ray in KG*.....214
Figure 5.20 Extract from transcript showing interaction extension by Ray In KG.....215
Figure 5.21 *Group Dynamics Engagement cluster*.....221
Figure 5.25 *3-D Chart showing principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for 6G*.....227
Figure 5.26 *Extract from transcript showing relaxed atmosphere in storytelling with 6G*.....230
Figure 5.27 *Extract from transcript showing positive exchange of looks in 6G*.....232
Figure 5.28 *Extract from transcript showing othering of Sylvia 6G*.....234
Figure 5.30 *3-D Chart showing principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for 3G*.....237
Figure 5.31 *Extract from transcript showing irritation with disruptive behaviour in 3G*.....238
Figure 5.33 *3-D Chart showing principal Group Dynamics Engagement Indicators for KG*.....245
Figure 5.34 *Extract from transcript showing classmate behaviour modification approach in KG*.....246
Figure 5.35 *Extract from transcript showing quietening indicator in KG*.....249
Figure 5.36 *The complete storytelling process through Indicators of Engagement*.....254

## ABSTRACT

The value of storytelling in a busy world, awash with multiple sound bites, myriad visual grabs and a seemingly endless input of information, is recognized and utilized in an increasing number of areas in modern society, including in all levels of education. Narrative is used in all cultures to give meaning to the human experience. When narrative is presented in the form of oral storytelling this meaning making and relevance are enhanced by focused listening and people are captivated by the shared experience that storytelling provides. This thesis addresses a gap in the literature about how children in particular engage with storytelling.

In an innovative approach to storytelling research, this thesis systematically examines the observable responses of a group of primary school aged children to a long term programme of storytelling. 88 children across the school grades of Kindergarten, Third and Sixth class participated in 6 storytelling sessions each. This thesis places 12 of the videotaped storytelling sessions under critical scrutiny and analyses every verbal and physical response made by each child in order to measure both their individual and collective engagement with storytelling.

In so doing, the thesis canvasses the challenges encountered in conducting such systematic research and utilises action research (Bryman, 2004; Gray, 2004) in the structure of the storytelling project and grounded theory (Dey, 1999; Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Tuetteman, 2003) in the analysis of the collected data. Storytellers who wish to conduct similar research are provided in this thesis with a replicable method and a project template they can adapt to suit their own particular needs.

The third part of the thesis is devoted to a detailed examination of what happened to the child participants as they listened to a wide variety of stories. Five clusters of Indicators of Engagement grew out of this research and they are employed as a means of measuring the individual responses to storytelling. The thesis establishes, in an academically rigorous manner, that there is indeed a means of measuring a listener's engagement with storytelling.