

The transformative power of tales: fostering language, empathy, and decolonial praxis in education

ISSN 2657-9774; <https://doi.org/10.36534/erlj.2026.04.05>

Carlos Andres Giraldo Montealegre

Faculty of Education Sciences (Universidad de la Amazonia), Colombia; carlo.giraldo@udla.edu.co

Abstract

Storytelling is more than just entertainment; it is a basic cognitive and social process that helps people create meaning and develop critical abilities. This study makes the case that narrative-based practices ought to be acknowledged as a fundamental pedagogical engine that is important for many aspects of human development, including cognitive, social-emotional, and sociopolitical domains. The paper first examines how the brain's innate propensity for narrative promotes causality, critical thinking, and advanced language acquisition, making stories a powerful medium for literacy and self-expression. It draws on research from developmental psychology, literary theory, and educational practice. Second, it explores how narrative fosters empathy and social skills, showing how the mental modeling of characters' experiences serves as a "moral laboratory" for the development of Theory of Mind (ToM). Importantly, the analysis includes a section that makes the case that storytelling is both an act of epistemic justice and a decolonial praxis. The Eurocentric canon and the "danger of a single story" are challenged when marginalized voices and local knowledge systems are prioritized. This makes narrative a potent tool for resistance, identity formation, and systemic change in educational settings. Finally, the paper discusses how the practical implementation of these theoretical insights can be applied practically using evidence-based models, such as the Storytelling/Story-Acting (STSA) practice, mental state-focused reading, and Digital Storytelling (DST). These tactics show how teachers can incorporate narrative to support students' overall development and develop the intercultural competency required for a fair, post-colonial society.

Keywords: *storytelling, decolonial pedagogy, epistemic justice, language acquisition, empathy, narrative cognition, educational practice, intercultural competence*

Introduction

The capacity of stories to unite individuals is significant. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that humanity has always told stories to give meaning to life, culture, and even itself, from cave paintings to current Netflix series. We have been telling stories for ages, and it comes naturally to us. It is the process by which we transmit to the following generations our values, beliefs, and knowledge (O'Byrne et al., 2018; Sartipa et al., 2025). Stories help us feel connected to others and are, in many ways, a part of what makes us human.

Today's schools appear to be a little different. Most of the time, the focus is on tasks that are simple to test, such as math or grammar problems. As a result, we occasionally overlook more imaginative and enjoyable learning methods, such as playing, storytelling, and imagining. In the classroom, teachers also face actual difficulties. Some students, for instance, simply no longer enjoy reading, and some may even be cruel to others (Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024). According to one study, bullying by a child may indicate that they have trouble empathizing with others (Rusli et al., 2025, 1).

This study argues that storytelling—whether through books, traditional tales, or digital apps—is far more than just entertainment. It is a powerful and enjoyable way to support the whole child. Stories shape how students think, learn, and interact with the world. When teachers bring storytelling into their lessons, they do not simply teach a subject; they help students develop language, critical thinking, and emotional skills that are useful for both

school and life. As Kucirkova (2019) points out, storytelling is one of the main ways we organize our very thoughts. This is not just about reading and writing; evidence shows that combining stories with inquiry-based learning can even help young children develop scientific skills (Nhase & Dube, 2023).

Therefore, this study will explore how stories build a foundation for language, foster empathy and creativity, and can even be used to include more diverse voices and perspectives in the classroom. Finally, it will present several practical, evidence-based strategies that teachers can use to harness the transformative power of storytelling with their students.

Theoretical background

The cognitive foundation: why narrative is a fundamental mode of human thought

To fully understand the educational benefits of storytelling, we must first look at how the human brain functions. Stories are ingrained in the brain, not just because it enjoys them. Narrative is more than just entertainment; it is one of the fundamental ways we think and try to understand the world around us. One influential idea in narrative theory is the distinction between narrative and computational thinking. Fletcher (2021) argues that computational thinking uses logic and mathematics in a timeless present (e.g., $1 + 1 = 2$), while narrative thinking is grounded in causation—the relationship that unfolds over time between a cause and its effects. This is a basic difference. Narratives are also fundamental because they help us with social cognition; they structure our understanding of the world by developing skills like empathy as we engage with the characters and their stories (Eekhof et al., 2022).

Fletcher and Benveniste (2022) hypothesize that, unlike data-driven computation, the brain's narrative capacity evolved as a survival strategy for coming up with novel solutions and actions in unfamiliar circumstances. In their view, this ability helps the mind envision new futures and look beyond the past. They formulate the contrast with computation as follows:

“Computation operates via mathematical and logical equations that exist in an eternal present tense (e.g., $1 + 1 = 2$ and ‘Bob is that man over there’). The present tense cannot comprehend narrative because (a) narrative is composed of causes and their effects and (b) a cause must temporally precede its effect. If the cause is rendered in the present tense, the effect thus must be rendered in the future; if the effect is rendered in the present, the cause must be rendered in the past.” (p. 32)

Imagination and play

This view of the brain as a storyteller fits with the theories of psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky said that imagination is a crucial function that is necessary for life (Vygotsky, 2004, 13). Smolucha and Smolucha (1986) explain that, according to Vygotsky, imagination begins in children's play and evolves into a uniquely human form of consciousness that emerges from social interactions (p. 3).

The shift from physical play to mental thinking is clear in Vygotsky's famous quote about older children: “Imagination in adolescents and school children is play without action” (Vygotsky, 1933, as cited in Smolucha & Smolucha, 1986, 93). This means that imagination is not just simple fantasy; it is a developed and conscious thought process. Stories and tales give the mind the rich, real-world materials it needs to practice problem-solving and generate new ideas (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 14, as cited in Tsai, 2012, 16). Narrative is a particularly effective tool for developing particular academic skills, beginning with language and literacy, since it appears to be a natural way for our brains to make sense of experience.

Building the tools for communication: how storytelling boosts language and literacy

The extent to which stories aid students in developing their language skills is among the most obvious and significant benefits of using them in the classroom. Learning to speak and structure ideas more skillfully and

strongly is just as important as learning to read and write. Research suggests that storytelling can have a positive impact on students' language development (Maureen et al., 2022).

1. Giving a boost to speaking skills

According to some experts, stories are excellent for establishing a "rich language environment" (Nurgiantoro, 2018, 89). In essence, it refers to an area where kids can converse and practice language in a relaxed and organic manner. Students have a genuine topic to discuss when they have a story to tell. This gives them more confidence and comfort when they talk. One student said, "I feel more at ease speaking in front of people when we discuss the stories because I know what the story is about" (Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024, 265). It is just easier to talk about things you understand.

According to studies, structured storytelling can help improve a child's vocabulary, story comprehension, and speaking skills (Chikamadu et al., 2022; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). In one project, for example, students used scrapbooks to tell their stories, which increased their confidence and clarity (Fellasufah & Mustadi, 2021, 200). Additionally, story-based activities assist students in converting passive vocabulary—words they have only read—into conversational terms. One excellent example is when students create digital stories. To tell it correctly, they need to remember and use certain words, which helps them move from just "knowing them" to actually using them in normal conversation (Gutor et al., 2023).

2. Fostering an early love of reading

Involving children in stories from a young age is a simple and natural way to lay the groundwork for their future reading. For instance, children can use the Storytelling/Story-Acting (STSA) model to write their own stories and then act them out with their peers. It is like a fun game, and they can see the connections between written and spoken words (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). In other words, storytelling helps children communicate more effectively when they read and speak. However, the benefits go beyond oral language. Studies suggest that storytelling activities can improve reading skills. For example, elementary school students who participated in storytelling lessons showed quantifiable improvements in their reading abilities (Chikamadu et al., 2022). But perhaps one of its greatest qualities is that it encourages children to read. It turns reading into something they enjoy rather than a chore. One enthusiastic student said, "...now, I look forward to it because the stories are so fun" (Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024, 263).

3. Finding their voice: storytelling as a guide for writing

Another great advantage of stories is that they act as a kind of writing manual. As they analyze different facets of a story, including the plot, the characters, and their problems, students start to learn how to organize their own thoughts. This facilitates others' comprehension of their writing. Digital storytelling tools, which require students to arrange their ideas, make connections between them, and plan their writing before they start, can help to strengthen this process (Sartipa et al., 2025). But writing is more than just grammar and vocabulary. Students learn how to communicate their own ideas and feelings as they follow the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a character. They also start to comprehend other people's emotions more fully. Thus, storytelling enhances students' academic and emotional development by teaching them to write well and bridging the gap between writing and understanding others.

Cultivating empathy and social competence: seeing the world through others' eyes

Stories serve as a safe haven where students can learn about emotions and social life in addition to teaching language. By engaging with narratives, students can examine difficult social situations and envision how various people might feel or respond. This process is key to developing empathy and social-emotional competence (SEL), which are crucial for success both in school and in daily life (Li, 2025). The core of this connection is what

psychologists call cognitive empathy, or the ability to see things from another person's perspective—closely related to Theory of Mind (ToM) (Kucirkova, 2019). When children immerse themselves in a story, they naturally infer what the characters believe, feel, and decide, even when those inner worlds are very different from their own (Wang & Shao, 2025).

For this reason, it is essential for teachers to design activities that allow students to understand and practice empathy. A practical way to do this is through pedagogical approaches like thematic learning, where different subjects are connected through a single, meaningful topic. Studies show that this can be an effective strategy for helping elementary school students develop these critical social abilities (Manda & Arifin, 2024).

This process is especially powerful because it encourages children to care about people who are different from—what researchers call “out-group” characters—those who may come from other cultures or have different experiences (Kucirkova, 2019). Moreover, other studies suggest that reading literary fiction, in particular, helps people strengthen their Theory of Mind (Rusli et al., 2025). By mentally connecting with the inner worlds of story characters, children practice the same skills they need to understand and relate to real people in their daily lives.

Practices and evidence

Educators can use a simple practice called “mental state talk”—openly discussing characters' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs during story time—which has been shown to improve children's Theory of Mind (Wang & Shao, 2025). A growing body of research supports the positive effects of narrative on SEL:

Emotional understanding: Interventions using digital storytelling have improved young learners' ability to correctly identify primary emotions (Khan et al., 2025).

The moral teachings of tales: Children can learn a lot about life and proper conduct from old traditional stories, such as Indonesian folktales. Children learn from these stories why characters behave in particular ways, which encourages them to consider their own behavior. Children can learn and put into practice virtues like responsibility, honesty, and respect through these stories (Kusmana et al., 2020, 104).

Better behavior and social skills: In addition to teaching children language, storytelling also helps them learn how to control their emotions. Storytelling can help children remain calm and play more peacefully with others, according to structured programs like the Storytelling/Story-Acting (STSA) method (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). This suggests that storytelling can help kids learn how to cooperate and get along with their peers.

Developing friendship and confidence: The way that storytelling fosters relationships between kids is perhaps one of its best features. They establish a welcoming and secure environment where anyone can talk and listen when they share stories in a group setting. Students who are shy will benefit the most from this as their confidence grows. “I used to be afraid to talk to the other kids, but after we talk about the stories together, I'm not scared anymore,” one student remarked (Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024, 267). Making friends seems simpler these days.

Children learn empathy and social awareness through stories that ask them to view the world through the eyes of a character. Being able to imagine how someone else feels can support both creativity and kindness. In the end, these skills help them not only in the classroom but also prepare them to bravely and creatively face the outside world.

Sparkling the imagination: how stories fuel creativity

Imagination and creativity are not “nice-to-have” or extra skills; they are essential for the mind. Like an exercise, telling stories helps to strengthen these abilities. Participating in stories gives students two important benefits: new ideas and a way to organize their own unique thoughts. Students can try out different situations, think of new solutions to problems, and even use stories to build mental worlds.

Simply imagining a story is creative in many ways. According to Fletcher and Benveniste (2022), narrative cognition helps the brain conceive original actions, which may be especially useful when navigating new or uncertain situations. Vygotsky's theory, which maintained that imagination is much more than daydreaming, is

related to this idea. He claims that it is actually a sophisticated way of thinking that develops through play and evolves as children learn (Smolucha & Smolucha, 1986). Imagination is a mental skill that can be developed and strengthened with the right experiences and activities, according to Vygotsky (1931, 10, as cited in Smolucha & Smolucha, 1986, 4). It is not just a “great fantasy” that people are born with.

Putting it into practice: creative techniques for the classroom

Stories can be a valuable resource for encouraging creativity. Fletcher and Benveniste (2022) propose narrative techniques for training creativity, such as world-building, where learners imagine new settings and the possibilities they open, and action-generating, where they speculate about what might happen when a new character enters a familiar situation. Their program has so far been piloted mainly with adults (military officers, executives, and graduate students), and the authors report expert endorsements rather than experimental data, so its effectiveness remains to be confirmed. Even so, these exercises may support creative thinking beyond writing, and teachers could adapt them for younger students. The settings and characters in stories provide children with the “bricks” they need to build their imaginations. After all, a castle cannot be built without materials, and Vygotsky believed that “imagination builds upon materials supplied by reality” (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 14, as cited in Tsai, 2012). The following examples illustrate how storytelling can encourage creativity in modern classrooms:

Creative expression: Through pretend play, role-playing, and puppetry, kids can freely explore. They can express their feelings, try out different roles, and solve problems in an enjoyable and secure setting (Li, 2025). For example, it has been shown that the Storytelling/Story-Acting (STSA) approach helps young children to imagine and pretend in new situations (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). Even though it might seem like simple play, this is crucial because a child’s early pretend play skills are often linked to their future creativity (Russ, 1998, as cited in Tsai, 2012).

Active creation: Using digital storytelling transforms students from mere listeners into creators. They use their own voices, sounds, and images to construct personal narratives. According to Robin (2008), as cited in O’Byrne et al. (2018) and Sartipa et al. (2025), this process helps them organize their thoughts and express themselves independently and artistically—skills that are essential in today’s world.

Visual imagination: Storytelling stimulates creativity that goes beyond words. “After listening to the stories, I started drawing pictures of the characters and places. I like to imagine what they look like in my head,” one student said (Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024, 268). This natural link between drawing and listening enhances students’ imaginations as well as their understanding and recall of the stories.

Taken together, these examples suggest that storytelling can be an effective tool for children’s development, supporting the growth of their minds, language, emotions, and creativity. They are not only theoretical ideas; educators can apply them in practical ways to help students learn and grow in a thorough and balanced way.

Methodology

In order to integrate current pedagogical and psychological research (mainly from 2015–2025) with fundamental theories of cognitive development and creativity, this study uses a qualitative documentary analysis and a narrative literature review. To create a theoretical framework for narrative-based education, the methodology focuses on combining data from developmental psychology, decolonial studies, and applied linguistics. This paper assesses the effectiveness of storytelling as a fundamental pedagogical tool in various educational settings by examining both contemporary evidence-based models (STSA, DST, etc.) and traditional theoretical perspectives on imagination, such as those established by Vygotsky.

Results and discussion

Storytelling as epistemic justice and decolonial practice

Storytelling has the power to change how knowledge and power work in education. It goes beyond just teaching language or creativity. Mafile’o et al. (2022) argue that storytelling is a key tool for decolonizing teaching.

It appears as a necessary response to the discomfort caused by the unquestioning search for scientific “evidence,” which often dehumanizes communities and distances them from their own knowledge. Wiebe (2019) adds that stories are never “just stories.” They are radical tools for social and environmental change, allowing us to intervene in dominant narratives. Decoloniality invites teachers to question the influence of Western thought that still shapes schools today. It opens spaces for perspectives that move away from Eurocentric rationality as the only way of understanding the world.

Challenging the canon

Conventional educational programs usually follow a Western or Eurocentric canon. Bradley (2023) defines this canon as a power-hungry “assemblage” made up of authors, prestigious institutions, and citation metrics that together create academic prestige. This system repeatedly leaves out local or Indigenous perspectives. Bradley and other authors capitalize “Indigenous” to recognize these views as legitimate and specific onto-epistemic frames (ways of being and knowing). Flores et al. (2025) emphasize that, even after political independence, higher education structures remain mostly Western. This invisibilizes the contributions of Indigenous peoples and local heroes.

Decolonial education demands a real change that goes beyond simply adding diverse books to a list. Bradley warns that simple “diversification” can become an administrative task that “tokenizes” or appropriates Indigenous literature without changing the colonial logic underneath. Therefore, we need a systemic reimagination of curriculum design and epistemic authority. This means moving from Eurocentric models toward localized and culturally respectful frameworks.

Stories as counter-narratives and the “art of refusal”

Stories can also serve as counter-narratives that challenge the dominant accounts of power and history (Cruz & Miranda, 2022). By sharing local stories, teachers and students can celebrate their cultures, expose historical injustices, and express different viewpoints (Flores et al., 2025). In this process, Nisa-Waller and Piercy (2024) propose using critical autoethnography to bring identity and “positionality” into the classroom. This allows teachers and students to share their vulnerability and recognize the power structures that have shaped their lives. It helps students understand their place in society and challenge unfair systems.

A powerful concept from Alormele (2025) is “Black joy” and the “art of refusal”—which involves generating happiness and hope in reaction to oppression. These are strategies of survival and radical resistance against institutional indifference and exclusion. This practice is not just an emotional state. It is a political framework that affirms the presence and creativity of marginalized communities. It allows them to refuse colonial norms while imagining more equitable futures.

Stories, place, and belonging

Many decolonial educators use storytelling to reconnect learning with the environment. Sutton et al. (2023) propose a “Place” pedagogy, where the environment is understood as an active teacher, alive and capable of teaching. The connection to the land, rivers, and ancestors builds a sense of community and belonging. It allows students to see education as something that comes from their own reality, not just from books written by others. This approach requires “deep listening” and being attuned to the “shimmer” of life in all its forms, recognizing that place and knowledge cannot be separated.

Storytelling as epistemic justice

From a decolonial perspective, telling stories restores the value of knowledge that has been suppressed or marginalized. It becomes an act of epistemic justice. Sharing cultural and personal stories is a political act that challenges who has the right to speak and be heard, as explained by Denzin (2018, 4, as cited in Nisa-Waller &

Piercy, 2024, 1145). Flores et al. (2025) point out that integrating Indigenous knowledge is not a symbolic act. It is a pedagogical imperative that promotes national identity and cognitive justice. Additionally, storytelling helps dispel “the danger of a single story,” as defined by Adichie (2009, 13m16s, as cited in Cruz & Miranda, 2022, 297), by providing a platform for a variety of voices.

Techniques like “storywork” and community immersion allow us to co-produce knowledge with culture holders. They validate orality and traditions as legitimate research frameworks. Finally, contemporary techniques like digital storytelling allow students to combine voice, image, and memory to share their own truths (Mafille’o et al., 2022). This facilitates intercultural dialogue in postcolonial societies. By reclaiming epistemic space, education becomes a vehicle for liberation and community dignity. It demands that institutions stop seeing the Western way as the universal norm and begin to value the many ways of knowing and being (Flores et al., 2025).

From theory to the classroom: real-world storytelling strategies

After talking about the value of storytelling, let us look at some real-world examples. Research suggests that incorporating stories into the classroom can support learning and development in several areas.

The following four instructional strategies have shown promising results in the studies reviewed:

1. Tell it, then act it out (STSA method)

Vivian Paley developed this well-known method, which blends writing, creativity, and teamwork into a single enjoyable exercise (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). This is how it works: a child tells a story they made up, and the teacher records it exactly as they say it. The young author then selects the actors for each role as the class performs the story together (Maureen et al., 2022). According to research, this activity is beneficial in two key ways. In addition to teaching kids to cooperate, control their emotions, and exercise self-control, it enhances early reading abilities like word recognition and story comprehension (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015).

2. Reading picture books with a focus on feelings

This method makes use of picture books, such as the Elephant and Piggie series, that depict the thoughts and emotions of characters. In order to encourage students to reflect deeply on the characters’ feelings or decisions, the teacher poses questions about them while they are reading (Wang & Shao, 2025). By imagining what it is like to be someone else, children can safely explore empathy and moral understanding during reading time, turning it into a “feelings lab” (Gasser et al., 2022). According to studies, this helps kids develop emotionally and socially in addition to improving their reading comprehension (Wang & Shao, 2025).

3. Learning from other students

Other students can be the best teachers at times. Everyone benefits when older children read to or narrate stories to younger ones. While the younger ones feel inspired and supported by a role model, the older ones acquire self-assurance and leadership skills (Waddington, 2020). In addition to improving literacy, this approach creates a more inclusive and cooperative classroom where students can share and benefit from each other’s knowledge (Waddington, 2020).

4. Digital storytelling (DST)

Storytelling enters the digital era with this method. Students create multimedia stories using text, music, images, and their own voices (Sartipa et al., 2025). Studies report several benefits:

- Greater engagement and motivation (O’Byrne et al., 2018).
- Improved writing quality, including idea organization and vocabulary use (Sartipa et al., 2025).
- It encourages collaboration and understanding between students from different backgrounds (Budiarti & Adar, 2023).
- It improves early literacy and helps students identify and express emotions (Khan et al., 2025; Maureen et al., 2022). Furthermore, DST can also contribute to decolonizing pedagogy by allowing marginalized students to create and share their own narratives and knowledge systems.

Together, these four strategies show that storytelling is much more than just a fun teaching tool. In addition to helping children become better students, they also show how stories can be integrated into the educational process and help them grow into thoughtful, creative, and caring adults.

Conclusion

The research reviewed suggests that telling stories to students can be an important part of their growth and education, not just an extracurricular activity. Because storytelling fits with the way our brains naturally work, it can be a comprehensive way to develop critical skills that support our success in life.

This study argues that narrative plays a central role in human thought and world-making. Stories help us understand cause and effect and encourage us to think of new ideas. From word recognition to the natural application of new vocabulary, the studies reviewed suggest that reading and listening to stories can improve language and reading skills. Because they provide a safe environment for children to observe and comprehend the emotions and viewpoints of others, stories also aid in the development of empathy and social skills. In addition, storytelling awakens imagination and creativity, which are very important for solving problems and creating new things.

Evidence-based approaches like the Storytelling/Story-Acting (STSA) practice, mental state-focused reading, and Digital Storytelling suggest that these benefits are achievable in the classroom. They indicate that when teachers use stories, they can teach the child as a whole person, both emotionally and intellectually. As Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) mention:

“To borrow a formulation used by Lewis (1995) to sum up her study of Japanese preschools, early childhood education is most valuable when it educates both hearts and minds—that is, when it simultaneously promotes the development of socioemotional and intellectual abilities—in effective and mutually reinforcing ways. The findings of the present study indicate that the STSA can help to do this, and therefore can contribute to enhancing school readiness in young children from low-income and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds.” (p. 27).

In today’s fast-changing world, the abilities developed through storytelling such as understanding others, communicating ideas clearly, and thinking creatively are more valuable than ever. When teachers bring narratives into their lessons, they are not only teaching academic content; they are preparing students with the skills and values they need to face and transform the challenges of the future.

Albert Einstein, whose words serve as a final reminder of the crucial connection between human progress and imagination, may have best captured the ultimate value of this endeavor:

“I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” (Viereck, 1929, 117)

References

- Alormele, N. (2025). “I dream of an island”: Black joy, storytelling and the art of refusal. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10, Article 1537033, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1537033>
- Bradley, L. (2023). Stories of the canon (stories of the self): towards an intra-active decolonisation of higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 44(6), 859-872. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2023.2202898>
- Budiarti, E., Adar, S. Y. (2023). Impact of digital media on social-emotional development in early childhood: A case study at TK Kartika XX-46 Kendari. *Golden Age: Jurnal Ilmiah Tumbuh Kembang Anak Usia Dini*, 8(2), 89-98. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jga.2023.82-04>

- Chikamadu, C. C., Onwuta, D. G., Nkem Iwe, D. N. (2022). The role of storytelling in literacy development among Nigeria primary school students. *International Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences (IJHS)*, 2(2), 40-44. <https://doi.org/10.69792/IJHS.22.2.7>
- Cruz, M., Miranda, M. (2022). Storytelling as media literacy and intercultural dialogue in post-colonial societies. *Media and Communication*, 10(4), 294-304. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i4.5814>
- Eekhof, L. S., van Krieken, K., Willems, R. M. (2022). Reading about minds: The social-cognitive potential of narratives. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 29(5), 1703-1718. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-022-02079-z>
- Fellasufah, F., Mustadi, A. (2021). A scrapbook of child stories as a media to improving the story-telling skill. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 15(2), 195-201. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v15i2.18014>
- Fletcher, A. (2021). Why Computers Will Never Read (or Write) Literature: A Logical Proof and a Narrative. *Narrative*, 29(1), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2021.0000>
- Fletcher, A., Benveniste, M. (2022). A new method for training creativity: Narrative as an alternative to divergent thinking. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1512(1), 29-45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14763>
- Flores, K., Gadaza, A., Galdonez, D., Pihnuton, J., Soriano, R., Killip, A. J. (2025). Decolonizing pedagogy: integrating indigenous knowledge and Philippine historical narratives in higher education curricula. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(1), 333-356. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7i1.130>
- Gasser, L., Dammert, Y., Murphy, P. K. (2022). How do children socially learn from narrative fiction? *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(3), 1445-1475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09667-4>
- Gutor, L. V., Sodomora, P. A., Vasylenko, O. H., Zalutska, H. I. (2023). Development of media literacy and communication skills by means of digital storytelling in Japan. *Information Technologies and Learning Tools*, 95(3), 56-74. <https://doi.org/10.33407/itlt.v95i3.5217>
- Khan, S. A., Poletti, G., Khan, F. N., Hussain, S. (2025). Digital storytelling: A pedagogical approach to enhance young learners' social-emotional skills. *Review of Education, Administration & Law*, 8(2), 219-228. <https://doi.org/10.47067/real.v8i2.421>
- Kucirkova, N. (2019). How could children's storybooks promote empathy? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 121, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00121>
- Kusmana, S., Wilsa, J., Fitriawati, I., Muthmainnah, F. (2020). Development of Folklore Teaching Materials Based on Local Wisdom as Character Education. *International Journal of Secondary Education*, 8(3), 103-109. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijsedu.20200803.14>
- Li, Y. (2025). The role of performance arts in acquiring language skills and developing social-emotional learning in young learners. *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 19(3), 289-298. <https://doi.org/10.56557/jogress/2025/v19i39535>
- Mafile'o, T., Kokinai, C. W., Redman-MacLaren, M. (2022). We Story: Decoloniality in practice and theory. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 22(6), 547-561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086221105666>
- Manda, D., Arifin, I. (2024). Teacher's strategy in fostering students' empathy through thematic learning approach in elementary school. *Celebes Journal of Elementary Education*, 2(2), 92-100. <https://doi.org/10.31605/cjee.v2i2.4483>
- Maureen, I. Y., van der Meij, H., de Jong, T. (2022). Evaluating storytelling activities for early literacy development. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 30(4), 679-696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.1933917>
- Nhase, Z., Dube, B. (2023). Integrating storytelling and inquiry-based approach as pedagogies of developing scientific skills. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 4(11), 32-42. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20234124>
- Nicolopoulou, A., Cortina, K. S., Ilgaz, H., Cates, C. B., de Sá, A. B. (2015). Using a narrative- and play-based activity to promote oral language. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 31, 147-162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.01.006>

- Nisa-Waller, A., Piercy, G. (2024). Autoethnography as a decolonising tool. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(5), 1142-1155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2307924>
- Nurgiantoro, B. (2018). *Sastra anak: Pengantar pemahaman dunia anak*. UGM PRESS. https://books.google.com.co/books?id=_ZtjDwAAQBAJ
- Nurhidayati, A. R., Yasmin, N. (2024). Transforming literacy and social skills through storytelling in a community-based setting. *Journal La Edusci*, 5(4), 256-275. <https://doi.org/10.37899/journallaedusci.v5i4.1652>
- O'Byrne, W. I., Houser, K., Stone, R., White, M. (2018). Digital storytelling in early childhood. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 1800, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01800>
- Rusli, D., Kurniawan, H. C., Kumaat, T. D., Hayati, N., Ningsih, Y. T., Nio, S. R., Susanti, R. E., Arben, A. (2025). The concept of reading literary storybooks improves theory of mind. *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 7(7), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2025349>
- Sartipa, D., Ithriyah, S., Kuning, D. S. (2025). Enhancing English writing skills through digital storytelling media. *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat dan Riset Pendidikan*, 4(1), 1971-1976. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i1.1879>
- Smolucha, L., Smolucha, F. (1986). L. S. Vygotsky's theory of creative imagination. *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, San Francisco, CA. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED274919>
- Sutton, B. A., Bellingham, R., White, P. J. (2023). Deepening our capacity for teaching with place. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 39(3), 362-374. <https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2023.22>
- Tsai, K. (2012). Play, imagination, and creativity: A brief literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 1(2), 15-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v1n2p15>
- Viereck, G. S. (1929, October 26). What life means to Einstein: An interview by George Sylvester Viereck. *The Saturday Evening Post*, 17, 110, 113-114, 117. https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/wp-content/uploads/satevepost/what_life_means_to_einstein.pdf
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42(1), 7-97. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:5713831>
- Waddington, J. (2020). Motivating self and others through a whole-school storytelling project. *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, 7(1), 124-144. <https://doi.org/10.21283/2376905X.11.188>
- Wang, Z., Shao, Y. (2025). Picture book reading improves children's learning understanding. *The British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 43(1), 12-35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12479>
- Wiebe, S. M. (2019). "Just" stories or "just stories"? Mixed media storytelling as a prism for environmental justice and decolonial futures. *Engaged Scholar Journal*, 5(2), 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.15402/esj.v5i2.68333>