

# World Language Stories

USA

Language Training



## Good Practice Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>

The families who speak languages different from English have little chance to access the formal Storytimes, resulting in fewer opportunities to learn for children. In order to give greater opportunities to these families, the Hennepin County Library (HCL) has designed the “World Language Storytimes”, a method that increases the benefits of literacy and early language development for children that are already engaged in the study of English. The main objective of World Language Storytimes is to provide essential information to help parents and caregivers to support children in their learning at home. Through a selection of books in English, and thanks to a teaching method that places the parent at the centre of education, it can be shown to children that learning English is simple and fun. This activity helps children in early learning and school success.

Anyway, even if it doesn't really address to workers, the methodology adopted could be interesting to apply and experiment in language learning in the labour market.

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<sup>1</sup> The source for this Dossier and the case studies outlined are from <http://www.hclib.org/extranet/>, by the Hennepin County Library which owns the copyright on all materials produced.

## **1. It is based upon a complete and up-to-date needs analysis.**

World Language Storytimes is a method suitable for everyone, and its target is only limited by the availability of books in the library. The librarian, in particular, is a key figure who takes care to present World Language Storytimes families, accompanying them to the best knowledge of the available resources in the library. In addition, the library is flanked by a "community partner" who has had special training in best practices of HCL storytime. The partner is mother tongue (target language) and also has a thorough knowledge of cultural practices that contribute to enrich the storytime experience. The books available at the library, combined with the support of community partners, represents a learning opportunity for infants, preschoolers and adults. This logic gives priority to teaching, of course, families who attend library programs and actively interpret the instructions and give him the librarian partners.

## **2. It is focused on the acquisition of competencies identified on needs analysis.**

It is possible to exploit the storytime reading non-fiction books, in order to make learning a new language more attractive for families and children. As a matter of fact, in many cultures, reading is done "for fun" also to increase their own culture. That's why books that contain practical information (insects, food, health, and so on) could be more appreciated by the families.

In many countries libraries are not always available, or are available only for academic use, so families from these cultures may not be familiar with the free access to books. Especially books for children.

The figure of "community partner" plays a key role especially when there are big cultural differences. Many families may not have received in their country of origin formal literacy, therefore they must be guided much more by the librarian as the "community partner". These families must also be encouraged and must be explained the benefits of joining the children at the storytime. There may be cultural issues with the proposed activities that must be arranged for every target group, in order to surround the families with a cultural environment which should not be different from their own, where they can feel uncomfortable. That's why the "community partner" is critical to plan proper access of these families to storytimes.

The "community partner" should also help to identify the suitable theme for any target group. Every culture has stories and themes in which it is easier to identify: they may be books that speak of everyday life, or a historical character. These preferences facilitate household access to language learning, and must be identified and used.

Since the ultimate goal is learning, educational materials that must be used to meet the participants' needs. Books with a good story and well done with lots of illustrations, help in learning the language and visualization of the story. The illustrations should help understand the context of history, and writing should be simple and clear. Otherwise, the participants quickly lose interest and you will fail the objective.

### **3. Its objectives are realistic.**

"World Language Storytimes" is suitable for all types of families, even those where both parents speak English but want the children to be exposed to a second language. Or to the families where only one parent speaks the target language and the other not. Or even the native language families who want to participate.

"World Language Storytimes" is promoted both in the official language in which you want to learn. It must be referred to as "bilingual storytime". The librarian leads the discussion and the "community partner" proceeds in the reading of books, songs and teaching materials chosen for the occasion. The experiences of bilingual education show that children are facilitated in learning if the languages are kept separate.

Here are some tips to be followed in order to plan a storytime:

- read the book in the native language and then discuss it in the target language;
- summarize the book before reading it in the target language; in this way, families and children can guess the history and practice with the words and the target language;
- have the native-speaking partner read the text in the target language and use the participants' mother tongue language at key points throughout the story to summarize it; in this way comprehension is reinforced, instead of doing word translation, which can get tiresome and, in terms of language acquisition, could not be considered a best practice; moreover parents realize how summary becomes a technique to foster early literacy development;
- use a book with illustrations, to be read aloud and followed by explanations;
- do not use books of poetry, because words are too complicated;

- select a new and interesting theme for each storytime, in order to stimulate conversation at home; in this way the family will learn new terms and will continue learning independently.

### ***Immersion Audience-Case Study***

The Youth Services Librarian at the Ridgedale Library has built a relationship with a teacher from a Spanish immersion school in her community. Here are some learning experiences she had:

- “I didn’t speak any Spanish prior to the Spanish storytime, but I used the library’s Spanish Language Collection and then worked with my community partner to choose the best stories to use.”
- “The keys to success were planning ahead of time and working with a community partner who was a regular storytime mom as well as a teacher, so she was comfortable with children in a learning environment.”
- “I was able to build relationships with families who didn’t attend traditional storytimes. I also met some parents who were native speakers, and my community partner translated important information about library services for them.”
- “A real benefit I see is that students in an immersion school are getting an opportunity to absorb the language and practice their comprehension skills outside of school.”
- “I learned some Spanish throughout the session, including basic greetings I can now use whenever these families visit the library again.”

#### **4. It is based on an updated didactic framework.**

The librarian is essential to help families use the services of the library, and to build trust.

Bringing parents in teaching their children, increases scholastic achievement. If the target language is taught directly by households, it will be enriched by the native culture. Furthermore, learning together increases the whole family self-esteem which, in turn, improves academic performance.

Parents learn to read stories to their children, out loud, in their mother tongue. In this way you will have the effect of an early literacy (the child is always exposed to the tongue). This oral language literacy needs to happen.

Particular and important attention is paid to explain to families how the library works. It is emphasized that all resources are free for both adults and children.

### ***Native Speakers of Target Language-Case Study***

The Youth Services Librarian at the Oxboro Library offered a Spanish storytime. Here are some learning experiences she had:

- “When choosing storytime books, I looked for books with repeating themes, so I chose "Mama, do you love me?" by Barbara Jooesse. It was not a good choice because my community partner did not know many of the animals described. She did not think that most of the parents would either.”
- “I also learned to be very careful regarding books that were published in Spain. Most of the storytime families are from Mexico or other countries of Central and South America. One of the books I suggested contained repeated verbal phrases that were particular to Spanish spoken in Spain. This is something my community partner explained to me.”
- “Be careful of translations for songs found on the Internet. I made the mistake of printing off the words for Ten little dogs. I didn’t have time to check them with my community partner, and I found out that they did not match the CD at all, and there are many different versions of this song.”

## **5. It incorporates some element of retroaction.**

The storytime method has most strong results if the diversity of language and culture are valued. Before reading a book, an overall introduction should be made in order to motivate the participants to learn about the culture referring to the target language. In this way, reading results to be more effective, because it stimulates the curiosity of children and families. For this reason, traditional tales, articles about the common life, songs, and so on are suggested to be used.

## **6. It takes into account a maximal number of constraints: absence, diversity, time and place.**

Trainees' diversity in terms of culture, level, gender, learning style, is taken into account, because lessons are strictly planned in order to have the maximum audience available. Thus, it can be inferred that there are no restraints when implementing the policy.

## **7. Transferability assessment**

### **7.1. Evidence of transfer**

The policy has been transferred in many situations and contexts in the United States.

### **7.2. Innovation**

The policy is highly innovative with no barriers to a potential transfer, since it is an example of how motivation and direct involvement can have positive results in language learning.

### **7.3. Dependence on political context**

The policy does not depend on the political context and, for this reason, can be transferred everywhere.

### **7.4. Flexibility**

This policy appears to have some degree of flexibility. The methodology outlined by the programme could be applied to all languages. Moreover, the goals described above could be easily in Europe since they seem to be in connection with all European acts about multilingualism. Anyway, it could be necessary to define transversal plans of adaptation in order to make it fully flexible, especially in the work fields.

### **7.5. Multi-region transfer**

The policy allows for multi-regional transfer, in principle, to any global region, to any region within and outside the EU and to an unlimited number of EU regions and extra-UE Countries. The target sector (families and their children) does not limit multi-region transfer. However, adjustments might be made in order to better adapt the programme to a wider extent of flexibility.