

Storybooks Canada, English Language Learners, and the School Curriculum

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Abstract

Given the large number of students from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Canadian schools, our study investigates to what extent an open access multilingual digital platform, Storybooks Canada (<https://www.storybookscanada.ca/>), might serve the interests of elementary school English language learners. Our study drew on insights from 13 experienced language tutors across greater Vancouver, each volunteering for a local organization in an after-school program for multilingual learners. We sought to determine how the diverse stories on the Storybooks Canada platform could be used in classrooms and homes in British Columbia and Canada. We investigated a range of questions, including the following: Is Storybooks Canada a helpful resource to improve student reading? Can Storybooks Canada be used to build home/school partnerships? How can the stories be used within the British Columbia Curriculum? We then did a follow-up study of British Columbia's English Language Arts curriculum in order to align the stories with curricular mandates. Our findings suggest that, given the universal themes of the stories, and the 18 languages available in text and audio, Storybooks Canada is a valuable tool for the maintenance of the first language, while supporting English language learning. Further, links between the stories and the British Columbia Curriculum may be helpful for teachers within and beyond British Columbia. We conclude with the hope that Storybooks Canada, and other derivative sites on the Global Storybooks portal (<https://globalstorybooks.net>), might support English language learners in Canada and the international community.

Introduction

According to the 2016 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada, 2016), more than 7 million Canadians speak a language other than English or French as a mother tongue. Further, Canadians who speak an immigrant mother tongue rose in number by almost a million between 2011 and 2016, and now represent 22.3% of Canada's population. Our study investigates how an open access multilingual digital platform, Storybooks Canada (<https://www.storybookscanada.ca/>), might serve the interests of children who wish to learn English and also maintain their mother tongue.

As explained more comprehensively in Stranger-Johannessen, Doherty, and Norton (2018), Storybooks Canada is a free digital innovation, collaboratively developed at the University of British Columbia to help promote the multilingual literacy of children and youth in Canada and the global community. By repurposing a selection of open-licensed stories from the African Storybook initiative, the Storybooks Canada platform has 40 illustrated stories, in text and audio, in 18 of the most widely spoken immigrant and refugee languages of Canada, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi, Arabic, and Somali, as well as English and French.

Indigenous Storybooks (<http://www.indigenoustorybooks.ca/>), a sister site of Storybooks Canada, led by Haida scholar Sara Davidson, is being developed to respectfully incorporate Indigenous stories and content that may be useful in Canadian classrooms and beyond. Other derivatives of Storybooks Canada are now freely available on the Global Storybooks portal (<https://globalstorybooks.net/>), which includes over 40 countries across five continents (Norton, Stranger-Johannessen, & Doherty, 2020). While there are other digital stories online, Storybooks Canada and other Global Storybooks sites are unique in that users can toggle between two languages of the same story in order to promote language learning. Stories can be read on diverse mobile devices, such as cellphones and laptops, and can also be downloaded and printed in multiple formats.

To investigate the relevance of Storybooks Canada for young English language learners, we conducted a small case study with 13 experienced language tutors working with elementary school-age multilingual learners in BC schools. Our research questions were as follows: 1) Is Storybooks Canada a helpful resource to improve student reading? 2) How can the stories be used to promote early reading? 3) Which stories are best for one-on-one vs. group teaching? 4) Can Storybooks Canada be used to build home/school partnerships? 5) How can the stories be used within the new BC Curriculum? We then did a follow-up study of the BC curriculum in order to identify links between the 40 stories and the English Language Arts curriculum. We begin this article by describing our conceptual framework, and then address our main study and its findings. We then turn to our follow-up study of the BC curriculum and the links we established between the stories on the platform and the BC Language Arts curriculum. We conclude with the hope that the Storybooks Canada digital platform and other freely available sites on the Global Storybooks portal may prove to be a useful resource for English language learners in Canada and the international community.

Conceptual Framework

Globalization and digitization have reshaped the communication landscape, deeply altering language and literacy education (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). With reference to early childhood education more specifically, the social context for early childhood literacy development has shifted from an exclusively print-based medium toward a more robust semiotic field that includes a variety of digital media (Razfar & Yang, 2010). Research has found that digital innovations can be used to support and develop minority languages and multilingual literacy in new ways, specifically by providing a commonly accessible platform through which free multilingual resources for use in classrooms and at home are made available (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Hare et al., 2017). In addition to traditional print-based books, children across all socioeconomic groups engage with electronic picture storybooks available on the internet (Kim & Anderson, 2008). It is therefore important for educators to make meaningful connections between the digital world and school-based curricula in order to make education more relevant to young English language learners.

As stated by Boyd (2003), “multicultural literature in the overall English Language Arts curriculum... is long overdue and positive change to the study of literature offers teachers and students a more realistic reflection of society, history, education, and schools” (p. 461). In terms of literature, themes centred on race, ethnicity, culture, and languages are commonly considered

important characteristics of diversity (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). Thus, literature is an excellent way to increase cultural awareness, develop comprehension skills, and provide writing opportunities. It also presents teaching opportunities for creating lessons on figurative language, symbolism, and idiomatic expressions (Pittsley, 2013). Such explorations help students to understand meaning and enhance the development of language, as well as encourage an interest in reading while valuing diversity amongst students.

Drawing on the theory of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1995), we recognize that migrant learners have rich resources of linguistic and cultural capital that language teachers can use to construct classroom environments where bilingual and multicultural identities are valued (Darvin & Norton, 2014). As educators work with increasing numbers of children and families from different cultural groups, including but not limited to immigrant and refugee children, it is essential they recognize and value the diverse ways that literacy can be supported in both homes and schools.

Scholars within the tradition of New Literacy Studies have specifically drawn attention to the innovative and productive potential of literacy practices in digital environments that children use both in and out of school settings (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Nixon, 2003; Sefton-Green, 2007). The emergence of hybrid digital forms, such as wikis, blogs, databases, digital stories, and online news, calls for new understandings of genre and textual features (Mills, 2010). New technical proficiencies with computers and other communication devices must be constantly learned and accessed for the rapid production, processing, and transmission of digital texts. Lemke (1998) argued that meanings in multimedia are not just words plus images, and that word meanings are modified in the context of image-meanings, opening up a wider range of meaning potential. As Dooley (2008) pointed out, a multiliteracies approach guides diversity “into” rather than “out of” literacy education. An example of this is the creation of dual language books and materials—multimodal resources utilizing multiple languages and modes which are oriented to supporting children’s second language learning environments (Cummins, 2012; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2013). As Lotherington and Jenson (2011, p. 228) noted, “If teachers are to meaningfully engage L2 learners in communication as it exists in the social world, these brave new dimensions of literacy must be woven into classroom learning.”

In the last 30 years, unprecedented levels of global mobility have meant that culturally homogenous classrooms are rare. Given the cultural diversity present in many of the world’s classrooms, many teachers, regardless of their current geographical location, are expected to develop curricula for local, immigrant, and refugee students while striving for high expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse students; respecting and understanding their cultural values, practices, and histories; and drawing upon and building on students’ “funds of knowledge” providing links between home and school (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Marshall & Toohey, 2010; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Teachers must try to bridge students’ home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district curricular requirements.

Even in the early grades, newcomer and bilingual students should be encouraged to activate their prior knowledge and build upon that knowledge by accessing their first language

(L1) resources. Building on this L1 knowledge will make second language (L2) content and texts more comprehensible and promote two-way transfer across languages (Cummins, 2014). This can be achieved through the use of multilingual books made available to students and teachers at school. Cummins (2000) states, “conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible” (p. 52). Such research is supported by Canadian immersion scholars such as Lyster, Collins, and Ballinger (2009). In addition, Moll and Gonzales (1994) and Brisbois (1995) determined that students could learn to read in their native language and English at the same time if teachers use strategies that are mutually reinforcing and provide adequate vocabulary instruction in both languages.

Teachers are encouraged to engage with and build on students’ experiences with diversity and connect these with the plurality of perspectives available, which could include knowledge of the global South (Leeman & Ledoux, 2005). Said (1993) argued that without integrating different cultural norms and values into classrooms, we perpetuate the dangers of a colonial legacy in which people have been encouraged to believe that they are only, mainly, or exclusively white or black, western or Asian. Said’s analysis leads us to reflect on the role of education in promoting learner identity (Norton, 2019). At a time when social, cultural, and linguistic diversity have become characteristics of education systems around the world, it is timely to consider how education and educators are responding to these developments in an increasingly digital world.

Research Design

Our study, which took place from November 2017 to June 2018, was conducted in collaboration with a Vancouver-based non-government organization (NGO) called Learning Buddies Network (LBN). LBN is an existing face-to-face tutor-based educational program that provides free weekly after-school reading tutoring for elementary school students who have been identified as being “at-risk” by their public-school resource or classroom teachers. The term “at-risk” refers to readers who are at risk of failing school because of reading deficiencies (Bailey, 2004).

The LBN programs run in nine schools across the Lower Mainland of BC with a high percentage of English language learners in each school. The Vancouver School Board (VSB) serves a large urban and multicultural school district with a significant English language learner student population. According to the VSB website (2018), 25 percent of Kindergarten to Grade 12 students are designated as English language learners, 60 percent speak a language other than English at home, and 126 languages have been identified in Vancouver’s schools.

LBN is dedicated to helping elementary school students develop foundational literacy skills, targeting children who otherwise would not receive the extra help they need in order to develop basic reading and math skills. The goals of the program are to enhance self-esteem through improvement in academic skills and to ignite a passion for learning in a safe and caring environment. The Reading Buddies program is designed for elementary school students who struggle with reading and are referred to as “buddies” who are individually paired up with local high school or university student tutors. Paired tutors/buddies meet regularly in a classroom setting at the buddy’s school or a nearby community center. A designated site coordinator is

present at all sessions to assist in mentoring the tutors and buddies. Each site coordinator supervises ten tutor/buddy pairings and has a minimum of three years' tutoring experience.

Participants

Insights about Storybooks Canada were drawn from 13 tutors who volunteer at LBN and agreed to be part of the study. They range in age from 17 to 26 years old and have between three and seven years of tutoring experience with diverse young learners. Nine of the participants speak two languages and four of them speak three languages, including Mandarin (4), Cantonese (2) and Punjabi (1). They all rate their digital competence as being excellent and feel comfortable using technology. The tutors have the opportunity to regularly interact with parents when they pick up their children from the program. They have learnt much about the interests and concerns of parents, as well as language and literacy practices in the homes of their students. The reading curriculum at LBN utilizes print-based materials only and there is no technology currently being used during the tutoring sessions. The tutors rely on flashcards, A–Z books, phonics drills, levelled readers, notebooks, pencils, crayons and markers for story writing and illustrating. All of the materials are currently available in English only.

Data Collection

Data were collected with the use of an extensive questionnaire. In November, 2017, participants were introduced to Storybooks Canada and given a workshop on its key features. Participants were then asked to review each of the 40 stories, noting which stories they thought would be most appealing and appropriate for classroom and home use, which stories would work best in group settings or one-on-one instruction, and how the stories could be incorporated into the BC curriculum. Most questionnaires were completed between January and March, 2018. The data were analyzed iteratively and recursively using open coding developed from the data by looking at repetitions and other patterns. Verbatim comments from the data are used for illustrative purposes.

Findings

Given the universal themes in the stories, as well as the colourful illustrations, the participants all noted that the stories would have appeal for students in Canadian schools. They collectively listed 17 (of 40) stories as their favourites: *Cooking*, *Decisions*, *A Tiny Seed*, *Feelings*, *Holidays with Grandma*, *Grandma's Bananas*, *Counting Animals*, *The Day I Left Home for the City*, *Why Hippos Have No Hair*, *Chicken and Millipede*, *Hair*, *Khalai Talks to Plants*, *The Honeyguide's Revenge*, *Simbegwire*, *Fire*, *Anansi and Wisdom*, and *Magozwe*. With reference to our five research questions, the participants noted as follows.

Do you think Storybooks Canada would be a helpful resource to improve student reading?

When asked if they saw digital stories, specifically Storybooks Canada, as a helpful resource to improve reading goals, 12 of the 13 participants responded that they see it as a helpful tool because it provides instruction in mother tongue languages, allowing students the “chance to feel represented” through the diversity within the stories. As one participant noted,

Storybooks Canada provides a new kind of character or way of storytelling (the folk tales) that some students might not have seen. It broadens the diversity that our students are exposed to or gives them a chance to feel represented when they usually aren't.

Another participant noted that “if a student is struggling with reading, they can quickly change the language.” The participants noted that digital stories are more engaging than print stories because of their multimodal, interactive design features. The participants also noted the colourful illustrations, as well as five levels of reading difficulty, making Storybooks Canada accessible to all students: “I believe it would be a helpful resource as it sections the stories by level, making them easier to locate, as well, it has a variety of colour options which I find the kids enjoy more than black and white.” The participants agreed that Storybooks Canada is “exactly what kids need” because “they are dying to get their hands on technology,” so it is a “great way to give them more interactive learning opportunities.”

Several of the participants mentioned the stories would be helpful for families who do not speak English, and that the linguistic and cultural diversity would be a resource to all, providing families with material to read in their home languages, as well as English. “I think Storybooks Canada would be a helpful resource as it provides an opportunity for kids to read different stories in their own native language at home with parents.” They found the “accessibility and user-friendly interface” important to be able to use at home. One participant commented on the repetition of language found within the stories to “reinforce new vocabulary.” With the content currently provided on their website, Storybooks Canada also “offers views into African culture which can draw many parallels across the reader’s own culture as well.”

How can the stories found on Storybooks Canada be used to promote early reading?

The participants noted a few main ways the stories could be best used to promote early reading. Given the print-only curriculum currently at LBN, they noted that the use of digital stories could encourage reading in a “more fun way” than traditional print-based books. “When the students are restless, they can use an electronic device to open the Storybooks website and access a more diverse variety of books.” The participants also noted that the opportunity to change languages was a valuable tool to promote L1 maintenance. A common theme amongst the participants was the value of the program as a tool for homework: “I think the stories would be a great resource for the program for homework, especially for children whose parents do not have time or are unable to help them read due to different languages (the majority).”

Two of the participants commented that the stories “can promote reading, but not necessarily teach it.” A few noted that Storybooks Canada can be used as a resource to supplement their current reading practices while others noted that “the ‘listening to stories’ option is particularly interesting, as kids can first use this tool to listen to stories being told, e.g. story-telling, before being encouraged to start reading themselves.” In addition, one participant said the stories “can promote early reading since they are a tool that parents can use, even if they lack the reading skills, to help [students] start reading at an early age.” One participant added that “the students can use these [stories] to practice skills they have been developing.”

Which stories do you think are best for one-to-one vs. group teaching?

We asked for insights as to which stories would be better used for one-to-one teaching and which would be better suited for group instruction. There was no strong agreement amongst the participants as to which stories would be more suited for one-to-one versus group instruction. Five responses stated that all of the stories would be equally effective in both teaching contexts. The participants were split between using lower- versus higher-level stories in groups as opposed to one-to-one use. Some wanted the more difficult and longer stories as opportunities to work one-to-one, while others felt the longer, more complex stories were better suited for group instruction “as they might be a little daunting for [students] to read on their own.” Some participants felt that “stories that have important lessons such as *Feelings* or *Holidays with Grandmother* were better suited for one-to-one instruction to really explain the lessons, and that “engaging stories about what they regularly encounter” were better suited for group contexts. Others noted that the “very complicated plot lines could lead to discussion within a group” in stories such as *Simbegwire* and *Magozwe*. One participant noted that the African context in and of itself could be used to encourage group discussion by posing the question: “what are some ways in which life in Africa is different compared to life in Western society?”

Several participants saw merit in using the level two and above stories for one-to-one instruction because “they provide opportunities for the tutor to find the main struggles a child faces in reading” and “involve a larger section of text per page and might require help for the children to read through.” One participant specifically referenced using the stories on the website to align with curricular goals such as short /a/. They noted that the longer, more complex stories will be of “benefit for vocabulary development which is more beneficial to teach one-to-one.”

How can using Storybooks Canada be used to build home/school partnerships?

When participants were asked if they thought Storybooks Canada would be a useful tool for promoting home/school reading partnerships, their response options were to check the “yes” or “no” box. Six of the participants took the time to write the word “definitely” next to the box for emphasis. As one participant noted, “I think the best part of this website is that it encourages the relationships between the child and parent.” One noted that “[parents] can be encouraged to read the stories in their own language, which may help them understand the stories before they try to read the stories with the children in English.” They acknowledged that “many times, parents have a mother tongue that is not English, and in these cases, the translations would be very useful.”

The lack of completion of homework and home reading has been an ongoing concern. The tutors believe that by sending home multilingual stories, parents will feel “empowered” and likely embrace the opportunity to read with their children and “actually improve their reading skills!” Their hope is that by having the students read more frequently at home, they will see greater gains from week to week in both reading fluency and vocabulary development “with less excuses not to read.” Specifically, one participant noted that “the stories that teach moral values are beneficial for parent/child so that the parent can also incorporate what values they want to teach their child through the story.” One went on to say:

We encourage parents and families to read with their kids at home not just in English but in their preferred language. By fostering a reading environment at home, hopefully this will stimulate kids' interest in reading and help them to develop better and more effective reading skills, which is what we aim to do at Learning Buddies.

One participant recommended a “listen, read, share” model that has the parents “listening with their child, reading with their child, then sharing similar stories from their own culture.”

How can the stories be used within the new BC curriculum?

One of the participants holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood and elementary education and is very familiar with the BC curriculum. She sees a strong relationship between Storybooks Canada and the new BC curriculum in that the stories from Storybooks Canada “could fulfill the content of teaching structure of a story, language features and structures, unique stories to share, connecting to our community, oral traditions, folk tales etc.” The ideas she is referring to are known as the “Big Ideas” that include generalizations, principles, and key concepts important in an area of learning. They reflect the “understand” component of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning by helping to chunk information and connect it to a student's prior knowledge (Wiggins, 2010). We discuss the BC curriculum in our follow-up study described next, exemplifying the ways in which Storybooks Canada can be linked to this particular school curriculum.

Storybooks Canada and the BC Curriculum

Given participants' positive evaluation of the potential of Storybooks Canada for English language learning, and the suggestions of the participant who was familiar with the BC curriculum, we undertook a follow-up study of the BC English Language Arts curriculum (found within the BC curriculum) and possible links between the mandated curriculum and stories on the Storybooks Canada platform. An examination of these connections may be helpful not only to teachers of English language learners in BC, but also to teachers in other parts of Canada and the global community (Gilman, 2018). The appendix to this article contains a list of stories and themes as they relate to the new BC curriculum. This information is also freely available on the “Teacher” link of Storybooks Canada's home page (<https://storybookscanada.ca/teachers/>). Through thematic planning, teachers can organize and integrate language, concepts, and cross-curricular areas that engage students in connected experiences that support learning (Roessingh, 2014).

According to BC's New English Language Arts Curriculum (2017), literacy is defined as the ability to understand, critically analyze, and create a variety of forms of communication, including oral, written, visual, digital, and multimedia, to accomplish one's goals. Literacy helps students apply reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills across a variety of subject areas. With respect to storytelling, in particular, “story” is defined as “narrative texts, whether real or imagined, that teach us about human nature, motivation, and experience, and often reflect a personal journey or strengthen a sense of identity. They may also be considered the embodiment of collective wisdom. Stories can be oral, written, or visual, and used to instruct, inspire, and entertain listeners and readers” (n.p.).

Schools in BC are populated by young people of varied backgrounds, interests, and abilities, and the K–12 school system focuses on meeting the needs of all students. When selecting specific topics and resources to support the implementation of the curriculum, teachers are encouraged to make sure these choices support inclusion, equity, and accessibility for all students. “In particular, teachers should ensure that classroom instruction, assessment and resources reflect sensitivity to diversity and incorporate positive role portrayals, relevant issues and themes such as inclusion, respect and acceptance” (BC’s New Curriculum, 2017, p. 8). The school system strives to create and maintain conditions that foster success for all students. These conditions include school cultures that value diversity and respond to the complex social and academic needs of individual students, and promote understanding of others and respect for all. Teachers and principals are challenged to provide curricula that meet the diverse needs of their students. In addition, “The Language Education Policy is designed to be an integral part of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan, and to recognize the official languages of Canada and the growing number of other languages spoken by British Columbians” (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 18).

BC’s New English Language Arts curriculum (2017) is designed to help students to become thoughtful, ethical, and responsible citizens of a diverse society. Informed by the First Peoples Principles of Learning (2014), diversity within the school system is based on the principle “that if our differences are acknowledged and utilized in a positive way, it is of benefit to the quality of our learning and working environments” (BC’s New Curriculum, para 1). To this end, students are introduced to a repertoire of communication skills, including the ability to interact, on a local and global level, with information from a variety of sources in multiple modes. Within this repertoire is the ability to critically evaluate digital media, a crucial skill for contemporary students. As students become effective and literate users of language, they are able to use these and other skills in achieving their personal, educational, social, and career goals.

Educators are encouraged to find meaningful ways to align the Language Arts goals with a set of Core Competencies as well as Big Ideas for a diverse set of learners in their classrooms. In order to guide instruction, BC’s New Curriculum (2017) identifies three core competencies that all students need to develop for success in life beyond school: 1) communication, 2) thinking, and 3) personal and social competence. These core competencies are directly related to students becoming educated citizens, and are embedded throughout the curriculum in order for students to develop intellectual, personal, and social skills. The *communication competency* encompasses the set of abilities that students use to impart and exchange information and ideas, to explore the world around them, and to understand and effectively engage in the use of digital media. This provides bridges between students’ learning, their personal and social identities and relationships, and the world in which they interact (BC’s New Curriculum, 2017). The *thinking competency* encompasses the knowledge, skills, and processes we associate with intellectual development. The *personal and social competency* is the set of abilities that relate to students’ identities in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society. In order to provide equitable programming, students must be able to maintain their own cultural and linguistic heritages and experiences while at the same time having opportunities to explore and gain an understanding of other cultures (Reyes & Vallone, 2008).

Integrating Storybooks Canada into the BC curriculum requires teachers to not only consider the core competencies, but to also address the new curricular model that has been implemented, known as “Know, Do, Understand” (BC’s New Curriculum, 2017). Within this model, all areas of learning are founded on a concept-based, competency-driven approach to learning. Three elements, the Content (Know), Curricular Competencies (Do), and Big Ideas (Understand) all work together to support deeper learning and to provide the framework upon which to plan effective instruction. In addition, technology is valued as contributing to the creation of the kind of society we strive for: one that embraces and values teachings, cultures, and stories from around the world.

Know (Content)

The content learning standards—the “Know” of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning—detail the essential topics and knowledge at each grade level. Regarding the “Know” for the Language Arts curriculum (K–3), students are expected to know story elements, text features, literary elements, reading strategies, and features of oral language. Storybooks Canada is a very helpful resource in this regard. Consider the following sample lesson based on *Chicken and Millipede*.

Sample lesson: Exploring language in a storybook. *Chicken and Millipede* is good for working with vocabulary and language sounds.

1. Look at page 10 of *Chicken and Millipede* below.



Chicken burped. Then she swallowed and spat. Then she sneezed and coughed. And coughed. The millipede was disgusting!



2. What words on this page will be new for the children you work with? You could write these words on cards and explain them. A fun way for children to understand them might be to act them out. For example, children love acting out “burp,” “sneeze,” and “cough!”
3. As you read the sentences on this page, become aware of the rhythm. What patterns of language are repeated on this page? How would you draw the attention of children to these patterns?

4. Choose a storybook in a language other than English. With the help of a student who speaks that language, what language patterns can you find in stories in this language?

Do (Curricular Competency Learning Standards)

The curricular competencies are the skills, strategies, and processes that students develop over time. They reflect the “do” in the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. While curricular competencies are more subject specific, they are connected to the core competencies. With respect to reading strategies found within the K–3 curriculum, Storybooks Canada can help teachers incorporate the following curricular competencies: use developmentally appropriate reading, listening, and viewing strategies to make meaning; recognize how different texts reflect different purposes; make connections between ideas from a variety of sources and prior knowledge to build understanding; engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate, to develop understanding of self, identity, and community; explain the role that story plays in personal, family, and community identity; use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and make meaning.

Sample lesson. Make connections between ideas from a variety of sources and prior knowledge to build understanding through asking questions:

For example, on page 10 of *Chicken and Millipede* (pictured above), you could ask,

- “Why did the chicken burp?”
- “Is it rude to burp?”
- “Why did the millipede taste so bad?”
- “How do you think the mommy millipede felt in this picture?”

Understand (Big Ideas)

The Big Ideas relate to generalizations and principles and the key concepts important in an area of learning. They reflect the “understand” component of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. The Big Ideas represent what students will understand at the completion of the curriculum for their grade. They are intended to endure beyond a single grade and contribute to future understanding. As outlined by BC’s new curriculum, the following information states the Big Ideas by grade level, and how Storybooks Canada addresses each of the Big Ideas embedded within the Language Arts curriculum for students in grades one through three.

Big Ideas. Examples of how Storybooks Canada maps onto the Big Ideas in Grades 1–3.

Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy. All of the stories found on the platform celebrate creativity. Many of the 40 stories celebrate families and feelings and provide readers with a sense of joy. For example, from the story *Feelings*: “I feel so happy when my granny tells us stories in the morning” and from the story *Holidays with Grandmother*: “They looked forward to the holidays. Not just because school was closed, but because they went to visit their grandmother,” and “Odongo and Apiyo were excited because it was time to visit their grandmother again.”

Stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves and our families. Many of the stories found on the platform teach lessons that help us learn about ourselves and our families. For example, the story *Grandma's Bananas* deals with stealing bananas and *The Day I Left Home for the City* is about growing up, leaving home, and moving away.

Stories and other texts can be shared through pictures and words. All of the stories on the platform are available in both text and audio and can be printed in PDF form with pictures only, text only, or pictures and text. The colourful illustrations are inviting and tell as much of the story as does the text.

Everyone has a unique story to share. For example, one story, *Sakima's Song*, is about a boy who loses his sight and has a beautiful singing voice that he uses to console an older man.

Through listening and speaking, we connect with others and share our world. The stories on the platform have many universal themes that connect readers to other parts of the world. For example, *Khalai Talks to Plants* highlights the commonalities between students and nature, and *Andiswa Soccer Star* unifies readers through gender equality as well as the beloved sport of soccer.

Playing with language helps us discover how language works. Storybooks Canada was designed for readers to toggle between multiple languages. By doing so, users can compare grammar, vocabulary, and syntax.

Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us. Each story on the site provides opportunities for curiosity and wonder. See Gilman (2018) for a list of 20 activities that help students use the stories to help construct meaning about themselves and the world. As a general example, print the stories in PDF version and have the students color them in. Just as no two students are the same, no two sets of books look the same. The stories provide starting points that lead to new discoveries about ourselves and others, which lead to curiosity about the world around us.

Stories can be understood from different perspectives. *What Vusi's Sister Said* provides an excellent example of perspective and how important it is to have perspective. Vusi was worried he had no wedding gift for his sister until she said, "Vusi my brother, I don't really care about gifts. I don't even care about the cake! We are all here together, I am happy." Through different perspectives, we learn about and better understand other people. *Magozwe* teaches that someone else's perspective is often helpful in life.

Conclusion

Section 3(e) of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Legislative Services Branch, 2019) states that one of its objectives is "to promote the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada while recognizing that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society" (n.p.). Greater numbers of students from refugee backgrounds are arriving in Canada, frequently with interrupted schooling, which has increased the need for language and literacy instruction to address significant gaps in education. Some of these learners

may come from very difficult situations that impact learning. Other students, although born in Canada, need additional support to be successful within the school curriculum. Respecting and valuing a student's first language is important in order for English language learners to succeed in school (Ministry of Education, 2016). With so many students from diverse backgrounds and cultures, as well as the many languages spoken in Canadian classrooms today, sourcing multilingual and multicultural materials can be challenging for teachers.

Our study with the Learning Buddies Network and 13 experienced tutors has found that Storybooks Canada can serve as a very useful resource for both teachers and parents. Powerful tools on this platform can help beginning readers and language learners make connections between speech and text, and between their home languages and English. Teachers can use Storybooks Canada as a resource to be shared with parents, building home/school connections, and affording the opportunity for linguistically diverse families to read stories together. It is a resource that values and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity, promoting both mother tongue maintenance and English language learning. As the leading Canadian scholar, George Dei (1996), has argued, curriculum in Canadian schools is diversified when programming is culture-specific without marginalizing other cultures.

In our follow up study, we found that Storybooks Canada aligns well with the new pedagogical and instructional frameworks incorporated in BC's New Curriculum. In particular, Storybooks Canada provides teachers with a tool to facilitate the Know-Do-Understand model of BC's New English Language Arts curriculum. We have suggested that such connections may well apply to other curricula, and interest in Global Storybooks continues to grow in other parts of Canada and beyond (Norton & Doherty, in press). Future studies will be very helpful in this regard. It is our hope that the Storybooks Canada site, along with others on the Global Storybooks portal, may serve the interests of English language learners not only in Canada, but across multiple sites in the global community.

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Appendix

Aligning Stories to the BC Curriculum by Theme

Level 1 Stories

Name of Story	Theme	Curricular Competencies/Content
<i>I Like to Read</i>	Families	Language Arts/Social Studies
<i>Counting Animals</i>	Animals	Math (counting to 10)/Geography
<i>Feelings</i>	Feelings	Physical and Health Education
<i>Fire</i>	Fire	Social Studies (fire safety curriculum), continuity and change / Science
<i>The Hungry Crocodile</i>	Animals/Food	Science
<i>Look at the Animals</i>	Animals	Science
<i>School Clothes</i>	Needs and wants	Social Studies
<i>Hair</i>	Diverse cultures, Backgrounds and perspectives within local and other communities.	Social Studies
<i>Two</i>	Parts of the body	Physical and Health Education
<i>Weather Book</i>	Weather	Science (weather changes)
<i>Lazy Little Brother</i>	Family; Diverse cultures	Social Studies
<i>Cooking</i>	Food and nutrition	Physical and Health Education
<i>What Are You Doing?</i>	Sensory motor skills/ Body awareness	Physical and Health Education
<i>Where Is My Cat?</i>	Prepositions	Language Arts
<i>My Body</i>	Verbs	Language Arts

Level 2 Stories

Name of Story	Theme	Curricular Competencies/Content
Why hippos have no hair	Revenge/Choices	Health Education
Children of wax	Rules/Consequences/ Family	Language Arts/Science
Tingi and the cows	War/Conflict/Challenge	Social Studies/Geography
Tom the banana seller	Gender equality/Diverse cultures/Communities	Social Studies/Geography
Decision	Cooperation/Challenge/Probl em solving/Cultural diversity	Social Studies
Punishment	Consequences/Sharing	Health Education
Khalai talks to plants	Environment/Nature	Science
Andiswa soccer star	Gender equality	Health Education
A very tall man	Problem solving	Language Arts
Zama is great	Independence/Growing up/Cultural diversity/Family	Health Education
Goat, dog and cow	Friendship/Justice	Social Studies

Level 3 Stories

Name of Story	Theme	Curricular Competencies/Content
Donkey Child	Celebrating differences	Socials/Health Education
Anasi and Wisdom	Sharing/Invention	Science/Social Studies/Health Education
A Tiny Seed: The Story of Wangari Maathai	Making a difference/Celebrating cultural diversity/Social impact	Science/Social Studies
Hen and Eagle	Responsibility/Procrastination	Social Studies
The day I left home for the city	Community: rural vs urban, village vs city/Growing up/Cultural diversity	Social Studies
Chicken and Millipede	Winning and losing/Friendship	Science/Health Education
Nozibele and the three hairs	Safety	Health Education
Sakima's song	Disability	Health Education

Level 4/5 Stories

Name of Story	Theme	Curricular Competencies/Content
What Vusi's sister said	Family/Material/Cultural diversity	Language Arts: sequencing/ Socials/Health Education
The Honeyguide's revenge	Folktale/Greed	Science
Grandma's bananas	Family/Secrets/Stealing	Health and Education/Social Studies/Science
Holidays with Grandmother	Family/Grandparents/Culture/ Diversity	Social Studies/Geography
Simbegwire	Overcoming adversity/Death/Family	Health Education
Magozwe	Struggle/Adversity/Identity/ Hope	Social Studies/Health Education



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