

Language Education and primary school children: the story of using stories

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Abstract

The present study concentrates on the development of interactive skills in the L2 and the pedagogical aspects of Young Language Learners' (YLLs) through the use of story telling. Such an approach reveals the benefits of encouraging creativity in learning and, as a result, captures the dynamics of the classroom and the progress of the learner. The data derives from an Action Research study carried out as part of a longitudinal study in South Western Greece, where storytelling is a neglected language learning source. The research concentrates on YLLs of a Beginners level, aged 7-9 years old. The results show the advantageous use of Action Research as a tool of intervention to apply necessary change in language teaching contexts.

Key words: action research, language education, early language learning, storytelling

Educación lingüística y niños de la escuela primaria: la historia del uso de historias

Resumen

El presente estudio se concentra en el desarrollo de habilidades interactivas en la L2 y los aspectos pedagógicos de Jóvenes Aprendices de Lenguaje (YLLs, por sus siglas en inglés) mediante el uso de la narración. Este enfoque revela los beneficios de fomentar la creatividad en el aprendizaje y, como resultado, capturar la dinámica del aula y el progreso del alumno. Los datos derivan de un estudio de Investigación-Acción realizado como parte de un estudio longitudinal en el Suroeste de Grecia, donde la narración es una fuente de aprendizaje de idiomas descuidada. La investigación se concentra en el nivel de YLLs para el nivel de principiantes, con edades entre 7-9 años. Los resultados muestran el uso ventajoso de la Investigación-Acción como una herramienta de intervención para aplicar los cambios necesarios en los contextos de enseñanza de idiomas.

Palabras clave: investigación acción, educación lingüística, aprendizaje temprano de idiomas, narración de historias

Introduction

Using stories, in any educational context, is undoubtedly beneficial and rich in pedagogical potential. In language education, the use of stories has been argued to be an effective language learning tool that meets the cognitive, emotional and psychological demands of the Young Language Learner (YLL). Stories offer children meaningful experiences that their imagination can relate to and, as Fillmore and Snow (2000) have argued, can sustain and enhance foreign language growth. Additionally, using stories in the language classroom gives teachers the unique opportunity to provide their YLLs with the motivation to play with language while building an appreciation of its sounds and meaning of words (Rubin & Wilson 1995). The fact that children are familiar with the nature of stories from their L1, makes the process a positive introduction to foreign language education, provided that it is presented in a context YLLs are familiar and comfortable with (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2002). Despite the positive outcomes that occur when storytelling is included in language education, many contexts do not include it in their curriculum, particularly in teacher-centred educational settings. The objectives of the present study are to 1) define the current language learning situation within the Greek context due to the complexities embedded in teacher-centred approaches in the YLL classroom, and 2) investigate the potential of introducing change through practitioner inquiry and reflections. More specifically, the focus of this article will be on storytelling as a student-centred teaching tool, where there will be a display of the background of storytelling, followed by the implementation of Action Research (AR) and the extent to which the methodology has broadened the potential of storytelling in the YLL classroom.

A Story telling Background

The art of storytelling is known to be as old as time, and is a form of an oral tradition found in all cultures (Nikolov, Mihaljević Djigunović, Mattheoudakis, Lundberg & Flanagan 2007). By including stories in language learning, the power of oral conversations may be exceeded (Dickinson, Griffith, Golnkoff & Hirsh-Pasek 2012) therefore, it is no surprise that stories are preferred by a number of language teachers since they help create a motivating environment, and encourage YLLs to use their imagination and learn while having fun.

The approach of the storyteller could provide a rich literature experience and encourage oral language development (Isbell, Sobol, Lindaeur & Lowrance 2004) while also prompting students to step out of their comfort zone and engage themselves in the literature and culture of the target language. In agreement with this, Nikolov et al. (2007) states that an early and regular exposure to stories can help YLLs enrich their schemata and interpret new information and experiences. Researchers such as Krashen (1981), Zdorenko and Paradis (2007) have reached the conclusion that L2 learning occurs when the input is meaningful, interesting and comprehensible. Furthermore, the comprehensible and meaningful input that stories provide helps activate the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a hypothetical tool in the brain that helps children learn and understand language (Chomsky 1968). According to Krashen (1981, 1993), learners become able to induce language elements from the data they receive, meaning that storytelling stimulates phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and

pragmatics. Morgan and Rinvulcri (1983) list a number of linguistic benefits due to story-telling, such as improved listening comprehension, grammar presented in true-to-life contexts, and numerous opportunities to encourage oral production. Interactionist theories (see Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991) support that language learners must engage in post-listening tasks and language-related activities in which they are encouraged to talk about what they listened to while the story was told (Renandya, Rajan & Jacobs 1999).

Apart from the linguistic benefits, listening to stories is a shared social experience that tends to provoke emotional reactions such as laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation (Nikolov et al. 2007), which is not only an enjoyable process but can help build a child's confidence and encourage social and emotional development. Stories, as Puchta (2015) argues, are more than mere entertainment, they help children develop an understanding of the world and their experiences. Vale and Feunteun (1995) argue that when YLLs listen to a story, in terms of comprehension, they become involved in different types of mental processes and create mental pictures of what they are listening to.

Of course, there is more than one way to tell a story, and every teacher has their own approach when it comes to delivering one. Some teachers prefer to read the story directly from a book, where the main reference of communication is the text, as it is presented on the page. When storytelling, the words are not memorised, they are recreated through an energetic performance, accompanied by audience (students') participation and interaction (Isbell, et al. 2004). Story reading and storytelling may be similar in content; nevertheless, the process of delivering the story is very different. Story reading does not provide the listener with many opportunities for interacting and spontaneous responses. On the one hand, the approach of the story reader could prepare YLLs for reading (Malo & Bullard 2000) and encourage the young learner to focus on text and accuracy. The approach of the storyteller, on the other hand, could provide a rich literature experience and encourage oral language development (Isbell et al. 2004) while also prompting students to step out of their comfort zone and engage themselves in the literature and culture of the target language.

Despite its advantages, storytelling may seem challenging and intimidating to language teachers. According to Brewster, et al. (2002), the successful storyteller would have to maintain the YLLs' interest and attention, and by telling the story, the teacher would bring out the student's individuality and personality; this is not a simple task.

Research Method

AR is a reflective process in which participants investigate their own practice, by using the techniques of research (Watts 1985). It is a systematic inquiry-conducted research methodology in order to gather data on operations of a school or classroom, reflect on how they teach and how effectively students learn (Mills 2003). With the teacher as the protagonist, the approach used aims to improve education by taking action into changing it and learning from the outcomes and procedure of this change (Kemmis & McTaggart 1992). The fundamental components of AR, according to Kemmis, McTaggart (1988), include 1) developing a plan, 2) implementing the plan, 3) observing and documenting the need for change and the effects of the plan set, and 4) reflection for future plans and action. The fact

that teachers have the opportunity to take action in their research is the most beneficial aspect of the approach. Teachers can focus on small-scale, contextualised, and localised studies where they are to develop or monitor change (Wallace 2000). More specifically, Richards and Lockhart (2009) provide examples of the Wallace's components where the teacher:

1. Selects a matter of concern and investigates
2. Selects the appropriate data collection tools in order to gather information
3. Conducts the analysis and decides on what actions to take
4. develops an action plan in order to bring about change
5. Observe the effects of the plan, and
6. Conduct a second action plan, if necessary
7. According to Mills (2003), AR when applied in a school or classroom can employ change. This allows the researcher to not only describe events, but explore the phenomena when they occur and provide a valid contribution and evaluation, with a view to improving the situation in question. The current investigation introduced a one year AR study, which entailed monitoring, intervention and modification to classroom practice, exploring the perspective of student-centred teaching approaches by integrating storytelling in the YLL curriculum. AR was considered the most appropriate research methodology as it would assist the teacher/researcher to investigate and monitor the effects of storytelling in a teacher-centred education context in depth. The results were to be used as an intervention to propose and apply change in the use of storytelling and teaching YLLs in the specific context.

The researcher of the current study was also the YLL teacher. The study took place at a private language school located in a major city in Southwestern Greece. The specific language school offered afternoon language lessons (English, French and German) to YLLs and adult learners and had approximately 300 registered students.

The purpose for practitioner inquiry and reflection was to underline the significance of storytelling as a student-centred approach that could enhance interaction and effective language learning. The findings were estimated to be particularly valuable as they are generated from an insider, the YLL teacher. In order to collect data, a research journal was kept during the course of the study to keep a record of a rich and detailed account of various routine procedures, phases of daily lessons and record any particularly interesting or theoretically significant events. The Director of the language school (DoS) observed 10 of the researcher's language lessons during the period of the investigation. These observations provide feedback on students' reactions to the nature of storytelling and the interactive tasks that derived from it. The observer (DoS) kept notes on observation sheets and within a twenty-four hour period provided the researcher with feedback sheets where the observer was encouraged to clarify ideas, comment on the children's progress and make suggestions for future development. The information gathered was intended to be read by the teacher/researcher as evidence to produce meaning and an understanding of the situation. Finally, the participant students were given follow-up questionnaires with the aim of gathering data and insights on how they view the foreign language, how an alternative teaching approach has made a difference in their language learning and to confirm validity of

the study. The follow-up questionnaires were distributed two years after the AR study was completed.

The participants of the study were young children ages 7-9 who were at a Beginners level. The story telling sessions were implemented in two different classes of children the same age, and there were a total of 24 students who participated. The participants were accustomed to teacher-centred learning approaches in mainstream schools, which did not prove to be beneficial in language learning as little interaction and communication is encouraged in such environments. All students shared the same native language (Greek), and attended English language lessons at the private language school.

The storytelling design for the needs of the AR study:

The design of a storytelling lesson that encourages interaction in a student-centred environment would involve consideration of the stages of the language lesson. The advantage of applying the storytelling approach is that various designs could be carried out according to teaching styles and preferences. Nonetheless, it is important to plan the lesson so as to deliver an interactive storytelling lesson where the teacher can facilitate L2 development and encourage creativity. Language lessons that encourage storytelling can provide support to students through important learning stages, which are 1) listening, 2) responding and 3) comprehending. In order to implement storytelling in the YLL classroom effectively the following teaching phases were adapted, as displayed in Table 1:

Table 1: The Three Phases of a Storytelling Design

Phases	Sample Options
Pre-task/Pre-teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-teach unfamiliar vocabulary from the story Give a chunk of the story to the YLLs and ask them to work in groups and guess what will happen next
Main Task: the story	Tell the story to the students: consider how you can make this story interactive? How will you involve the YLLs in the storytelling process? Which parts of the story are best for student involvement and which for clear listening?
Ideas for post-story task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use arts and crafts to recreate what the students just heard about in the story Ask YLLs to work in groups and come up with a different ending Ask YLLs to work in groups and continue the story

The first phase ‘pre-task/pre-teach’ included a number of tasks a teacher can engage the YLLs in before the storytelling begins. This phase gave the teacher the opportunity to introduce key elements of the story and help the students develop an early understanding of the second phase and enjoy it. The teacher used this opportunity to encourage YLLs to use their imagination about the plot of the story and what will happen. The second phase was the story itself, the ‘main task’. This phase is crucial as it is the point where the interaction element will thrive and where students thinking and listening skills can develop. The teacher considered the parts of the story where interaction was encouraged, how this will occur and where the students will take part in the process. The final phase is the ‘post-story task’, which gives students the opportunity to follow-up on the story and their understanding of it.

The aim of the AR study was to encourage interaction and communication inspired by the design displayed in Table 1. It was estimated that the children would benefit from a ‘storytelling plan’, as it would help add meaning to the stories, create a connection to the language lesson, and help the teacher smoothly integrate storytelling sessions to YLLs who were accustomed to a teacher-centred environments in mainstream schools.

Story telling put into Practice

The present section demonstrates how storytelling can be applied through the right resources and has highly satisfying results in children’s language education. The focus of the lesson was to promote interaction and spontaneity in a monolingual context where the students’ only exposure to the target language was in the classroom. Language learners of this age can engage in projects which demand that they take responsibility for their learning. By including these projects in the language lessons the level of the child’s personal involvement becomes higher and can consequently enhance motivation (Philips, Burwood, Dunford & Maley 1999). In the current study there was an effort to introduce games, storytelling, role plays and various other activities that would intrigue the students and help them use the TL in class in a more spontaneous manner. One example of this is a lesson with the beginners’ class where students were introduced to storytelling, which was also observed by the DoS. Before the story was told, the teacher/researcher pre-taught some of the vocabulary that students were not familiar with. This was done by writing the unknown lexical items on the board and eliciting their meaning by miming or placing the words in context. According to observation and journal data, the children were recorded to be involved, and all made the effort to estimate the meaning of the words mimed.

For the needs of the article there will be an example of a storytelling activity applied in the Beginners’ class, as recorded during the AR. The story told was taken from Vanessa Reilly and Sheila M. Ward’s resource book entitled ‘Very Young Learners’. The story used and discussed here was called ‘Why do Rabbits Have Long Ears?’ and its aim was to enhance students’ listening skills, enrich their vocabulary and emphasise the phrases ‘I am a’ and ‘You are a’. The story was ideal for beginners as the vocabulary and structure of the story was easy for the students to follow, but also gave them food for thought and new vocabulary to learn (Giannikas 2013).

The resource book suggests that as part of the story, YLLs must be convinced that rabbits have not always had long ears and that the students were going to discover how rabbits changed. Before the story was told, unfamiliar vocabulary was pre-taught by writing unknown lexical items on the board and eliciting their meaning by miming or placing the words in context. This was done to avoid surprises and confusion while the story was being told. When students are not aware of what they are going to encounter they tend to panic, lose concentration, and even give up. A simple introduction of unknown vocabulary brought the students closer to what the story would be about, and also gave them a sense of confidence. The children were involved and felt great pleasure when they correctly estimated the meaning of the word, even though they were out of context.

After all the unknown vocabulary was clarified, the children were asked to sit in a circle whilst their teacher was seated in the centre of the communication network. It was important to create a comfortable environment for the students so that the children could relax and enjoy the experience. This helped them lower their anxiety levels and accept input. Furthermore, having children sit in a circle for story time is something they can relate to, as they may have been in a similar layout when being read a story in their L1 at school. The positive environment in the specific context created excitement, and the YLLs became very eager to hear the story, which provided the teacher/researcher with their undivided attention. As the story progressed, the YLLs became involved in the story telling process during which they were encouraged to mime, pretend to be different animals, and elicit names of animals, which made the plot interesting and challenging, since the sole medium of communication was the target language. Additionally, there was a great deal of repetition in the story which helped students learn the new vocabulary effortlessly and use it in context while interacting. Interaction gradually became increasingly vibrant which was also a positive indicator for the teacher since the students were involved in all parts of the story and were more than willing to participate. This was an interesting change for the students since, according to the data collected in the questionnaires, 67% of the students stated that they do not do any interactive activities in the language classes at school, and only 25% stated that their language lessons at school were interesting. One could argue that the fact that language learners in Greece are not as successful compared to children of other European countries despite their early exposure to the L2 is that they are not introduced with teaching approaches that would be age-appropriate and motivating.

The AR acted as an intervention in this case, and according to the observer:

'The children were very involved in the story since they were the animals (roles) and listened very intensely. During the reading there was involvement and exchange among the teacher and the students'

Additionally, it was important to consider the grammatical points that occurred within the story and how these were to be presented to the YLLs. According to the observation data:

'Since the story included a number of irregular verbs, the teacher first mentions them in present form and then past, shake-shook, see-saw and also translated the words in Greek'

After the story was told once, the students were asked to tell their teacher what they understood from it and what the main point was. This was done not only to verify that children were able to follow the plot but to also give them the opportunity to show their teacher and their peers this ability. All children volunteered to provide the class with the information, giving a sense of confidence as they enthusiastically and impatiently raised their hands. When one of the children was selected to give a short summary, the student immediately asked whether the answer should be given in their L1 or in the L2. Given that the child was a beginner and it would be difficult to deliver the summary in the L2, it was suggested that the summary be given in L1. This way, the child could freely express himself because the key of giving the summary at this stage was to evaluate the participants' comprehension rather than their oral skills. The child selected gave a precise summary of the story, proving that everything was understood even though the story was told in the L2. This is evident in the observation data below:

'The student told the story in Greek and demonstrated that he understood the story throughout. I was very impressed to hear all the details of the story. The students were able to practice their Listening skills, they learnt new vocabulary in a relaxed and pleasant manner and they practiced their comprehension skills'

The teacher/researcher provided the YLLs with a follow-up task which was connected to the plot of the story. The children were requested to work in groups and create masks of various animals that appeared in the story. In their groups, the YLLs were encouraged to communicate to each other in the L2. By the end of the lesson, the task was completed successfully and students wore their masks as they left the classroom and walked out to their parents producing the animal sounds that matched their mask. This experience provided the YLLs with rich language learning, self-confidence of full comprehension of the target language they were exposed to, and an entertaining learning experience.

Story telling recommendations after the AR

Cameron (2001) has found that storytelling is an oral activity designed not only for listening but also for involvement and enhances class participation. A language teacher can become a successful storyteller by applying simple techniques and engaging into the story themselves. In order to gain as much as possible from this rewarding journey, storytelling tips will be presented here not only to present how a story can be told, but how to create an environment that supports interactive learning and vivid student participation.

There can be many learning elements in a story:

- 1) **Creativity and abstract thinking** are an important part of language and literacy development. Stories encourage children to develop these features of their personalities. For this to be accomplished, the language teacher must encourage YLLs to use their imagination.
- 2) **New vocabulary** is often presented and it is important that new words and idioms are spotted in order to pre-teach and prepare learners for what will follow.
- 3) **Grammar points** must also be considered when planning a storytelling lesson. It is important to check the tenses used in the story, whether or not they are complex and if they would be understood by the target audience. Furthermore, structure and word order can differ in stories in order to create effect. This should be identified early on for two reasons. One reason is that it could be confusing for the students, and the second reason would be for the teacher to prepare the dramatic effect used in their voice and gestures as a result of the unusual structure and/or word order.
- 4) **Organising story elements** can help teachers deliver the story and prompt interaction productively. When rehearsing the story, teachers will need to consider the length and complexity of the sentences. If sentences are too complex, they may need to be modified according to the level of the students. Also, teachers will need to make sure the narrative will be comprehensive to the YLLs. If not, some ideas may need to be explained beforehand.
- 5) **Visual aids** are very helpful with young learners. When used in storytelling, visual support can intrigue the YLLs and trigger their imagination. Visual aids could include drawings, flash cards, cut-out figures etc. The teacher can involve the language

learners with the help of illustrations and encourage YLLs to comment on them and the story.

- 6) **Using gestures, mime and facial expressions** are necessary for the progress of the story and reaching the goal of creating an interactive environment. Even if the teacher shares the same L1 with the YLLs, using gestures, miming and facial expressions prompts students to guess and understand what the teacher is trying to say, which simultaneously results to building the students' self-confidence as language learners and motivating them to become more communicative and interactive in class.

If teachers are new to storytelling, it would be useful for them to evaluate their skills which will help them improve as story tellers (Brewster et al. 2002). One approach is to keep a record of each story telling experience, make a note of what could have been done differently and what went well. As Brewster, et al. (2002) suggest, this could be done by keeping a record on a self-assessment sheet where the teacher can comment on various aspects of their story telling, i.e. their pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, YLLs' participation, variation and what needs to be improved.

Preparing a Storytelling Session: the result of reflection

This section is included in the paper as a result of the journal notes and reflection during the AR study. Teacher reflection continues to be part of the teacher education literature and has been recommended as a means of incorporating pedagogical issues into teaching thinking and practice (Howard 2003).

Simply telling a story without the appropriate preparation could lead to undesirable results for both teachers and students. Children may become discouraged and lose interest early on in the lesson or even develop negative feelings toward L2 story telling, and teachers may lose their confidence in incorporating stories in their classes. Preparing the story telling lesson can help teachers avoid such situations.

1. **Selecting the right story:** when choosing the story to present to YLLs, a teacher must consider the audience. It is important to introduce a story that will be suitable to their level and age.
2. **Becoming familiar with the story:** in order to become a good storyteller, it is important to become familiar with the story itself. This will help teachers pinpoint the parts where the students can become more involved and let the student-interaction happen. It would be helpful to read the selected story several times, master its structure, consider the sections of the story and where it is headed and think of the tone and body movements that will be used.
3. **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse:** It is vital that teachers rehearse their stories before they present them to their YLLs. This will help teachers 1) develop their storytelling skills 2) practice becoming more vivid in their narrating by using gestures and facial expressions 3) practice using eye-contact in order to have the children's undivided attention.
4. **Outline the incidents of the story:** of course learning a story word for word is not practical and is very time-consuming. It is advisable that teachers become familiar with

the incidents of the story and make notes of its structure and how they wish to deliver it.

5. **The story telling technique:** the teacher's voice while telling a story is the most important ingredient to its success. It is important that the story be told aloud and clearly so that all students can hear and follow. The teacher's voice can hint to the students what they should be feeling at a given point, i.e. happy, excited, anxious and/or relieved. The teacher should be prepared where the reading pace will change, where the volume of the voice will change and where to narrate slowly. Students usually follow the teacher's voice and interact in a similar manner when they become involved in the storytelling process.
6. **Encouraging Creativity and Abstract Thinking:** it is important that teachers encourage their students to be creative through the storytelling lesson. one example of creativity work could be to ask YLLs to sit in groups and work on an alternate ending to the story which can be narrated at the end, or encourage children to create a dialogue among the characters of the story and role-play.
7. **What are your language learning goals:** setting goals guides the teacher regarding where the story leads the students, and what should be accomplished by the end of it.
8. **Relax and enjoy:** the advantage of using stories in the language classroom is not only that it is beneficial and enjoyable for the students, but it is enjoyable for the teacher as well. Teachers are given the opportunity to put aside course books and grammar books and present something more creative that will trigger their students' imagination, which is rewarding on so many levels. As teachers tell stories to their YLLs, and interact with them while doing so, they can enjoy this enlightening language teaching approach.

Concluding Notes

The present paper has outlined reflections on the role of storytelling in the early language learning classroom, and how one could apply it effectively in order to bring about the advantages story telling has to offer. Furthermore, the paper has listed a number of techniques that can be put into practice and encourage interaction through tasks that encourage creativity, abstract thinking and language development. The storytelling approach can also give a fulfilling sense of achievement to the language teacher. By presenting YLLs with a well-planned storytelling lesson, teachers can encourage children to step out of their comfort zone and interact with their peers and teacher in the L2, and integrate a certain kind of spontaneity in their thinking and speech. Once they view themselves as L2 users they become more successful learners, take risks when interacting or working on an activity in the L2, and gradually feel more comfortable using the target language. For these reasons, it is important that storytelling is viewed as an essential part of language teaching to YLLs. Through storytelling, a teacher can offer a child a rich journey of language and culture with a language teaching tool that is familiar to the language learner.

The evidence in this article suggests that investigating the gradual change to a student-centred environment via storytelling can provide the practitioner with insights on 1) the needs of the YLL and, 2) the balance to be considered in each stage of storytelling implementation. Furthermore, AR can encourage language teachers to cooperate and

communicate with their students via interactive story telling. Reflecting on the finding that derived from AR gave the teacher/researcher the opportunity to demonstrate how best to integrate age-appropriate tasks, in a manner that would not disrupt language learning or confuse the students. The process and objectives of the study works as an intervention to apply story telling in the YLL classroom, and hope to inspire teachers to conduct their own AR in their context in order to investigate and integrate effective practices.

The Need for Further AR

In education, it should be a teacher's concern how they may improve the quality of learning and teaching in their environment and acceptance of the fact that classroom-based research is required, which must focus on the needs of the language learner and teacher. Dörnyei (2007) has defined research as a method used when one seeks answers to questions and wishes to gain more knowledge of the world around them. Through AR, there is great potential for improving language teaching as the concept of AR in education is to identify problematic situations or issues researchers consider worthwhile for investigation, and to intervene in situations with the intention of producing critically informed changes in practice (Byram 2004; Lundberg 2007).

The field of language learning has emphasised the importance of teaching practices, learning experiences and various other pedagogical matters originating from the language classroom (Nunan 1990). It would be valuable if, Ministries of Education facilitated teachers' professional development by organising a series of AR programmes, where teachers may be given the opportunity to improve their techniques as they adopt different methods of language and teaching via research and reflection.

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Christina Nicole Giannikas is an Instructor, a Teacher Trainer and an ELT consultant. She currently works for the Language Centre at Cyprus University of Technology and is a Pre-service teacher trainer for the Department of Education of the University of Cyprus. She holds a PhD in the field of Applied Linguistics and has been involved in a number of research projects with a focus on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in early language learning contexts, digital storytelling and literacy, student-centred teaching approaches, language teaching policies, teacher education and professional development, language assessment literacy, special education in the primary school context, and E-learning/ Blended Learning in Higher Education. Dr. Giannikas is the Chair of the EuroCALL Teacher Education SIG and Chief Editor of the Teacher Education SIG's recent edited volume *Professional Development in CALL: a selection of papers*.

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