

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Effectiveness of Braidy, the StoryBraid® as a Tier-One Classroom Intervention

by

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BEd

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Faculty of Education

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Vancouver Island University

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We accept this Thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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### Abstract

This research used a case study approach to explore the effectiveness of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® as a tier-one, whole-class intervention in supporting students' oral narrative and story retell. Braidy® is a visual and tactile tool used to support children in retelling and developing a story. Braidy® is made up of different icons that help children remember the important parts of a story, including: Character, Setting, Initiating Event, Internal Response, Plan, Attempts, Direct Consequences and Resolution. These components are essential to retelling and ultimately writing. The study took place in a kindergarten, grade one and two classroom. Students participated in the research three to four days per week over an eight-week period. The data collected in the study was qualitative in nature. Data was collected through three methods: lesson notes, journal of the researcher and students' drawing/writing samples. Results proved *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® to be an effective tier-one, whole class support and in conjunction with other studies is a promising multi-tier level of support. *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® promoted the use of higher-level language through its engaging and tactile methodology. In this research, based on the findings, I find the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® to be an effective program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories.

*Keywords:* Oral Narrative, Storytelling, Story Retell, Braidy, the StoryBraid®, Tier-One Intervention, Case Study, Story Grammar

### **Acknowledgements**

The support of my family has been essential during my pursuit of my Masters in Special Education. To my mother and husband, Kevin, thank you for your belief and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Ana Vieira for her support, guidance and insight from beginning to completion of this journey. Mary, I greatly appreciate the time you have taken to read and respond to my work. Lastly, a special thank you to my students whose contributions to this study were invaluable.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Research has confirmed there is a range of emergent literacy skills related to children's later reading and writing success (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Emergent literacy is defined as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing, as well as the environments that support these developments" (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002, p. 934). The three main areas of great importance in early literacy development are oral language, print knowledge, and phonological sensitivity (Lonigan et al., 2000). Oral language encompasses vocabulary, syntactic knowledge and narrative discourse processes. It plays a crucial role in both the decoding process in the early stage of reading and comprehension in the later stage (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Print knowledge includes alphabetic knowledge, conventions and the functions of print. Alphabetic knowledge refers to the ability to rapidly recall letter names and sounds. Conventions of print is the basic awareness of print concepts, for example, print is read left to right/top to bottom and recognizing the difference between the picture/text. The functions of print is the early understanding of the purpose of written language, for example, to tell a story or get directions (Lonigan et al., 2000). Finally, phonological sensitivity refers to the child's ability to play with language. This includes recognizing and creating rhymes and hearing syllables and phonemes. Research has established that children who demonstrate strong phonological sensitivity learn to read more quickly (Lonigan et al., 2000). Children who enter kindergarten lacking these critical pre-reading skills have a high likelihood of being referred for special education services (Lonigan et al., 2000).

A child's environment preceding school can greatly impact their oral language development (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Research indicates environmental implications are

profound. Fernald and Weisleder's (2015) study concluded that "children who did not have the benefits of rich verbal engagement early in life were more likely to be behind in cognitive and language skills in kindergarten and elementary school" (p. 1). Studies show that parents' education, income and socioeconomic status greatly impacts the quality of parent-child interactions (Fernald & Weisleder, 2015).

The language exposure of children growing up in poverty is often low in quality and quantity, thus creating a significant gap prior to school entry (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Research estimates, within the first three years of life, there is a 32 million word gap between children of lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds (Fernald & Weisleder, 2015). The gap continues to become more defined as children finish preschool and enter kindergarten and grade one where formal reading instruction begins (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Nevertheless, if provided with high-quality instruction, the oral language skills of children living in poverty have the potential to significantly improve. Teachers who provide high-quality instruction, "participate in and promote active listening, provide feedback to children's language, model rich language and support children in developing their language skills and vocabulary knowledge" (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016, p. 336).

### **Personal and Professional Context**

According to Lonigan et al. (2000), approximately one in three children will have significant challenges in learning to read. I grew up a struggling reader. I believe because of this I had an unenthusiastic and negative attitude toward reading throughout my elementary school years. I have spent time looking back on my experiences and wondered what could have been done differently to support my emergent literacy journey? Although I do not remember my emergent literacy experiences, conversations with my mother indicate I was given many opportunities to develop crucial emergent literacy skills. Prior to kindergarten, I attended preschool for one year.

Before preschool, I attended drop-in programs at the local recreation center and library focusing on play and language through books, rhymes, and songs. We borrowed books regularly from the local library and I was read to each evening. My mother also stated she was not made aware of any literacy concerns in my early years of school. Looking back at old report cards, my teachers had reported me as meeting expectations in literacy in kindergarten and grade one. It was around third grade when I began to struggle with reading. At this point, I received tutoring from a former teacher and spent countless evenings battling my mother on the couch over home reading. Later, in elementary school, I remember being the student who during silent reading would select a chapter book that I knew was too hard and pretend to read it because I did not want my classmates to know I was struggling with reading. In grade five, my teacher noticed concerns around my speech and referred me for further assessments. I began receiving speech and language services for an interdental lisp in late grade five.

Much to my mother's surprise, when I began my teaching career, I immediately developed a fascination and love for teaching literacy. I have been drawn to the complex and multifaceted phenomena of emergent literacy and its role in learning to read. I love watching my students' progress through their literacy journey as their emergent literacy skills come together. I also enjoy sharing information with parents of ways in which they can support their child's literacy journey. My dream is that no matter where a child is in their literacy development, they will grow to love and appreciate literacy.

My interest in the role of oral language and literacy sparked six years ago when I began teaching a combined kindergarten to grade two classroom with a significant number of students identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Kindergarten students entered my classroom with no formal education and many students had very limited to no English vocabulary. This compelled

me to spend time focusing on developing a deeper understanding of emergent literacy so that I could support my students' needs more effectively. In order to further my knowledge, I attended professional development opportunities, read books and articles on emergent literacy and completed an Early Years Learning Diploma through the University of British Columbia.

Through my research, I came across the concept of oral narratives. An oral narrative is the telling or retelling of a story. It is a "description of a series of actions and events, logically connected, that unfold over time because of specific causes" (Pinto et al., 2018, p. 144). The ability to tell a story requires strong grammatical skills, the ability to formulate sentences, relate meaning across sentences and organize content in a meaningful way (Vadnerwalle et al., 2012).

I wondered how I could enhance my current language arts routines to support my students' oral narrative skills. I began searching for a tier-one support that would be inclusive of all learners in my classroom. Upon speaking with colleagues, I quickly discovered that like myself, my colleagues were doing very little to improve students' oral narrative skills. I felt that my colleagues and I lacked exposure to programs that target oral narrative skills and training on the importance of developing students' oral narrative skills in the classroom. Upon further research, I came across the story grammar program, *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®. Story grammar provides a structure for breaking down and forming stories (Rand, 1982). Furthermore, it can be described as "a set of rules that define both text's structure and an individual's mental representation of structure" (Whaley, 1981, p. 763).

### **Critical Issues of ELL in Special Education**

Over the years of learning and growing with my students, I observed students flourishing, showing significant growth in their English language abilities in relatively short periods of time. I also observed students progressing more slowly and demonstrating gaps in their English language

abilities as well as their reading progression. I grew to understand that English Language Learners can present a very unique set of challenges in the field of special education.

An ELL is an individual whose first language is a language other than English. They are learning English as a supplementary language and are not yet proficient in English (Swanson et al., 2016). Children whose first language is not English often face difficulties acquiring reading skills in English in the early grades (Haager & Windmueller, 2001). The consequences of poor literacy skills are profound. Hernandez's (2011) study indicated that "[o]ne in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers" (p. 3). Although the third grade may seem like a very early predictor of a child's educational attainment, it is in third grade when a student transitions from the stage of "learning to read to reading to learn" (Skebo et al., 2013, p. 361). This transition places heavy importance on strong early literacy experiences prior to the third grade.

Conventionally, special education involves the need to provide adaptations and/or accommodations in learning to the students it serves (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Techniques, strategies and supports used for students with special needs often work for all. However, children with special needs will likely fail without them, whereas children without special needs will still succeed (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). With this in mind, the context of ELL in special education is complex. There are many issues with determining if reading issues are due to language acquisition or a learning disability. The next section will review the critical issues of misdiagnosis and delayed diagnosis of ELL students.

### ***Misdiagnosis***

Students who are ELL are often assumed to struggle with reading because of low oral language in English due to a lack of exposure. This leads ELL students to be placed into special

education classes where oral language and vocabulary are a focus. The hope is that the exposure to English will result in improvement in all academic areas. However, if there are other undetected challenges for the student (such as a learning disability) there will likely be minimal academic improvement (Limbos & Geva, 2001).

Limbos and Geva (2001) investigated the accuracy of teacher assessments of second language students at risk for a reading disability. The results of the study suggest that "teachers inappropriately use oral language proficiency as their gauge for the child's overall academic achievement" (p. 149). This brings forward the critical point that teachers need to ensure they are not assuming low academics is an attribute of low English language, instead take the time to investigate to avoid a misdiagnosis.

### ***Delayed Diagnosis***

Klinger et al. (2006) found that a child who is an ELL and is experiencing academic difficulties in literacy is often delayed a learning disability diagnosis for up to four to five years to allow time for the child to acquire English language proficiency. However, delaying this process can greatly impact preventative and remediation strategies that a student who is an ELL could have been receiving (Limbos & Geva, 2001).

### **Purpose of the Study**

As I continue my emergent literacy journey, I became fascinated with the role of oral language in literacy. I began with a simplistic view of oral language: young children need time to talk. With time I have developed an understanding of oral language and have discovered that oral language is much more complex. Oral narrative skills are particularly intriguing to me because of the higher-level of language required to tell and retell stories. The ability to tell a story involves more complex skills than those required in daily conversation. Storytelling involves both higher-

level language and cognitive skills (Vanderwalle et al., 2012). As a result, I was motivated to investigate if Braidy, the StoryBraid® would be an appropriate Response to Intervention (RTI) tier-one support to reach the needs of my students. RTI is the belief that all students can be successful if the amount of time, intensity, frequency and expertise of instruction is tiered based on the needs of the learner. Tier-one supports are "quality core instruction that uses [a] gradual release of responsibility" (Douglas & Frey, 2010, p. 23).

In this research, I focus specifically on the emergent literacy skill of oral language. My goal is to improve my language arts instructional practices, particularly in the area of oral narratives. Through a case study approach, I explored the following inquiry question: How effective is the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories?

I hope findings from my research can support teachers in developing an understanding of the importance of oral narrative skills in kindergarten and primary grades. I also hope that by completing this study, I can share with teachers the critical importance of early intervention and an evidence-based oral narrative program that is inclusive of all learners and can be utilized as a tier-one support in their classrooms.

### **Overview of Study**

In chapter 1, I discussed my experience in both a personal and professional context. I asserted the critical issues of oral language in the context of ELL and environmental factors that impact oral language development. Next, in Chapter 2, I will present the developmental sequence of oral narrative skills and provide an overview of story grammar. I will review the current literature on oral narrative skills in reading development and story grammar interventions. Then, I will discuss the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* approach. After, in Chapter 3 I will describe the



methodology of the study. Next, in chapter 4, I will present the findings of the study. Finally, in chapter 5, I will provide a discussion, recommendations, limitations and summary of the results.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

In recent years, oral narratives and the story grammar approach have become popular topics of research. The literature review begins with an examination of the development of oral narrative skills. Then, it will provide an overview of story grammar. Subsequently, it will investigate the role of oral narrative skills and their role in reading development. Next, the review examines the effects of story grammar interventions on specific populations. Finally, the literature reviews the *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® approach to teaching story grammar.

#### Development of Oral Narratives

A 1982 survey investigated the views of Preschool and Kindergarten teachers on the teaching of oral narratives in the classroom. Findings revealed that teachers have historically “viewed retelling stories, a form of storytelling, as time-consuming, difficult for the children, and without documented educational value” (Morrow, 1985, p. 648). Recent researchers, such as Stadler and Ward (2005) have stated that narratives although worthwhile are generally still an underused structure in supporting the language development of young children. Three main reasons for incorporating oral narratives into one's teaching practice are: “First, narratives are a useful tool for the development of oral language (Morrow, 1985); second, narratives are thought to form a bridge to literacy (Hedberg & Westby, 1993) and predict academic success (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987); third, there is evidence that narratives are related to conceptual development (Applebee, 1978; Vygotsky, 1962)” (as cited in Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 73). Moreover, kindergarten narrative competence has been proven to be a valid predictor of future reading, writing, theory of mind and overall school success (Pinto et al., 2019).

Children's language development starts at birth as they begin interacting with caregivers and others around them. Their interactions begin conversational in nature, developing an understanding of meaning, structure, and use of language. At age three to four years old, children begin using the narrative format of language (Stadler & Ward, 2005). Narratives require more complex language than conversation. Typically developing children are able to tell and retell basic stories at the age of six years old. At the age of seven years old, multiple episodes begin to unfold and by the age of nine and ten years old stories increase in detail and episodes. As a child develops, episodes become increasingly complex, including initiating events, attempts, and consequences (Vadnerwalle et al., 2012). Stadler and Ward (2005) outlined the development of oral narratives into five levels: labeling, listing, connecting, sequencing and narrating.

### ***Labeling***

The first stage in the development of oral narratives is labeling people and objects. This stage includes nominal labels, repetitive syntax, and assorted and unrelated thoughts (Stadler & Ward, 2005). An example of labeling by a four-year-old, prompted by a picture of a cat and a girl watering flowers is: "No, that is not my cat. That's my cat. That's her cat. This is, and this is bee. Here's my girl" (Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 74).

### ***Listing***

Listing focuses on a central theme and includes verbs to list attributes or actions to connect items (Stadler & Ward, 2005). An example of a listing story told by a picture prompt of a school classroom is:

My picture is a XX. And it have, and it has kids with music. And there's some guy who's teaching them how to do music. And then trying to make it. Some of 'em are not listening cuz that one's who's being, like (gestures) are doing that. This one's doing that. And so he

broke the wire with the call the phone (claps). He break it and the guy's drinking some soda. And they're doing their music concert. And the end. (Note: "XX" indicates an unintelligible word). (Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 75)

### *Connecting*

Connecting, like listing, focuses on a central theme; however, children are using increasingly more pronouns to connect ideas, characters, and events (Stadler & Ward, 2005). An example of a connecting story told by a five-year-old is:

I have a garden by my house. And, it, um, I have a dog. And my dad puts her poop in the garden. Yeah, because that's the only place we can put it. So he puts it in the garden. And we have some little pink flowers growing in there. And, um, they, um, my grandma and gramp came over. And they were going to check one day. And then we saw those red flowers and they were blooming. And, um, um, my mom always goes to the garden. And she takes a watering can and waters them so they grow. They grow, but not too often in the spring. (Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 75)

### *Sequencing*

Sequencing involves the ability to accurately use temporal sequencing (arranging one event after another) and cause/effect. In this level of narrative development, a child is able to answer the "when" and "why" in their story sequence (Stadler & Ward, 2005). An example of a sequencing story told by a 5-year-old is:

On my birthday, I was holding my cat. And then my Mama took a picture with my brother holding it. And I was holding his head. And it was Jessica, my big sister's cat. And her name is Callie. But she doesn't have front nails. And she's very little, because Cindy took

her to the doctor. And then the doctor cut all her nails out. But it didn't hurt at all. She couldn't feel a single thing. (Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 75)

### *Narrating*

Narrating encompasses all four levels while adding a plot, more complex language and allows the listener to predict the ending based on the beginning of the story (Stadler & Ward, 2005). An example of a narrating story is:

As she looked up, she saw her fairy godmother. And the fairy godmother said, "No wonder you're so sad. I must make you a coach." And she did. And Cinderella said, "Don't you like my dress?" "It's wonderful!" her godmother said. And she looked again. "Oh, good heavens, my child, you couldn't go in that." So Bibbety, Bobbety Boo. There stood Cinderella in the most perfect gown. And Cinderella said, "This is wonderful. It's like a dream." And the prince danced with the charming Cinderella. And the king said, "That prince danced with that girl all night. So I think that means he found the girl that he wanted to marry. (Stadler & Ward, 2005, p. 75)

Assessing a child's oral narrative skills, "offers a rich source of information about the higher-level language abilities of young children" (Vanderwalle et al., 2012, p. 1858). Oral narrative skills can be assessed through a story generation task or a story-retelling task. In a story generation task, students sequence cards or use a wordless book to generate a story. In a story-telling task, students listen to a story and are asked to retell the story back to the evaluator (Vadnerwalle et al., 2012). A child's oral narrative competence is evaluated on structure, coherence, and elements that allow the listener to understand the characters, plot, actions, setting and time (Pinto et al., 2018).

### **Oral Narratives and Reading**

A possible clue to what goes on in reading development can be gleaned from a study by Humphreys and Parsons (Applied Psychological Measurement, 1978). They found that a measure of listening comprehension taken at grade 5 was a better predictor of intellectual ability - measured partly by reading tests - at grade 11 than measures of reading ability taken at grade 5. This suggests that a fundamental factor in reading development is language development. Language development, we may assume, is better indexed by a listening test than any reading ability test because there are special factors that influence reading ability tests. Quoted from John B. Carroll speaking to the Reading Hall of Fame, April 1981 (as cited in Rand, 1982, p. 382)

This quote is very powerful because it demonstrates the crucial role of oral language in reading development. This section explores the relationship between children's oral narrative ability and reading.

Stothard et al. (1998) addressed the long term consequences for 71 children diagnosed with a history of speech-language impairment (SLI) ages three to four years old by following up with them 12 years later. Stothard et al. (1998) asked the question, "Do some children really "grow out of " early language delay with no long-term consequences, or is such recovery illusory, with subtle underlying problems persisting?" (p. 409). The researchers conducted a battery of tests in the areas of spoken language and literacy skills to compare with same-age peers. The achievement gaps were significant, 22% of the control group, 52% with a resolved SLI and 93% with a persistent SLI scored below the year 12 level for reading accuracy, reading comprehension or spelling. In terms of spoken language, students with resolved SLI performed nearly on par with the control group in all areas, except for Sentence Repetition, Nonword Repetition, and Spoonerisms where

they performed significantly lower. The persistent SLI scores remained significantly lower than both the control and the resolved SLI. The results concluded that if a child's language difficulties are still present at ages five to six years old, the child is at a high risk for academic and language difficulties throughout life. If the language difficulties are resolved by five to six years old the child is still at risk for academic difficulties but the outlook for language is promising (Stothard et al., 1998).

Gilmore et al. (1999) studied the relationship between oral storytelling ability and reading comprehension. The students were between the ages of five to seven and diagnosed with a learning disability. Oral storytelling was evaluated through story grammar components and assigned a developmental complexity. Reading comprehension was assessed through a standardized passage comprehension task. The results concluded that the students' developmental level of oral storytelling predicted their performance on the reading comprehension task (Gilmore et al., 1999). Gilmore et al.'s (1999) study supports the hypothesis that reading comprehension and oral storytelling use comparable cognitive and linguistic structures. Continuing to develop an understanding of the relationship between oral language and literacy development will "lead to more effective intervention programs for children who are experiencing language-based learning difficulties" (Gilmore, 1999, p. 142). An area of future research could examine if activities designed to strengthen oral storytelling will, in turn, strengthen reading comprehension (Gilmore et al., 1999).

Oral language has been deemed the foundation for reading development by many researchers (Reese et al., 2009). Reese et al. (2009) examined the first three years of reading instruction in terms of the connection between oral narratives and reading. The researchers conducted two studies, the first examined children's oral narratives in relation to their reading

skills after one year of reading instruction and the second after two years of reading instruction (Reese et al., 2009). The findings demonstrated oral narrative skills play a strong role in reading abilities at the two year mark of reading instruction and a weaker role at the one year mark. The researchers also found a correlation between oral narratives and reading fluency at the year two mark, noting that both require semantic knowledge and expressive language skills (Reese et al., 2009). Reese et al. (2009) further explained the connection between reading fluency and language in later years, “by the time children are reading complex storylines, their understanding of individual words and their understanding of larger narrative macrostructures are essential for fluent reading” (p. 640). Therefore, as a child advances in their reading abilities, oral narrative skills become increasingly more crucial (Reese et al., 2009).

Hester (2010) studied the relationship between narrative structure and reading skills in African American (AA) children. The study examined typical reading (TR) and reading disabilities (RD) in AA fourth-grade students. The goal was to make a correlation between narrative structure and reading skills in AA children. Hester (2010) also considered gender and dialect in the study. The results indicated that narrative structure skills vary greatly between AA students with RD and TR, regardless of dialect. Students with RD presented limited knowledge of story structure components. “Specifically, children with RD are less proficient at applying story knowledge for use of evaluation, complicating action, high point, resolution and coda statements” (Hester, 2010, p. 79). Gender did not account for significant differences in TR and RD narrative structure. Further research could investigate variations in topics and story types among AA students with RD, as prior research indicates these factors impact students with RD performance on story recall tasks (Hester, 2010).



## Overview of Story Grammar

Story Grammar models were developed by reading researchers in the 1970s following research by cognitive scientists in the area of schema theory (McVee et al., 2005). Early concepts of schema are recorded back to Plato and Aristotle. It was also central in Piaget's (1952) “structural theory of the origins and development of cognition” (as cited in McVee et al., 2005, p.535). Schemas are “higher-order cognitive structures that have been hypothesized to underlie many aspects of human knowledge and skill. They serve a crucial role in providing an account of how old knowledge interacts with new knowledge in perception, thought and memory” (McVee et al., 2005, p.537). Throughout history, the schema theory has been commonly published in Language Arts textbooks to support pre-service and in-service teachers in understanding the cognitive process of reading comprehension (McVee et al., 2005).

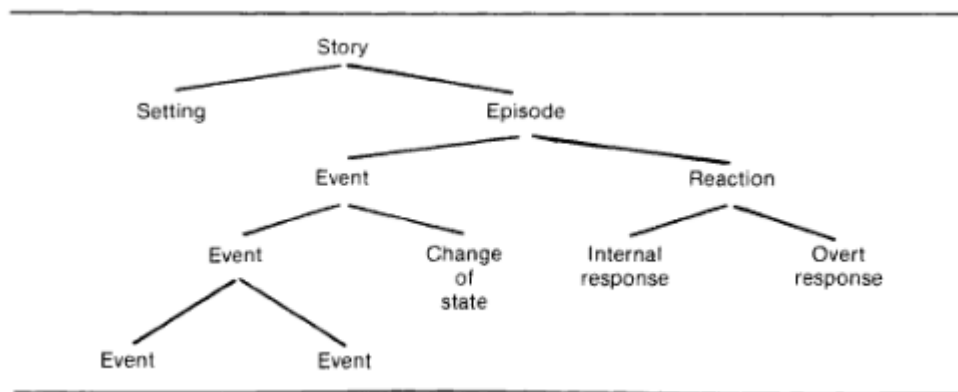
Schemas are used in comprehension and recall. A story schema is a general structure that includes the sequencing of story elements. A story schema supports the reader in focusing attention on key elements of new information while managing prior events (Rand, 1982). The schema tells the reader if information should be held in memory until more details are added or if that component of the story is complete and can be stored. The more a story follows the schema structure, the more precise one's recall will be. Early reading research on story structure described schema in regards to story grammar, providing a structure and break down of stories into parts (Rand, 1982).

Lakoff (1972) proposed the first model of story grammar by reformulating Propp's (1968) Russian folktale theory. Soon after Colby's (1973) model emerged based on the grammar rules of Eskimo folktales. In 1975 a pivotal point in story grammars occurred: Rumelhart's story grammar emerged (see Figure 1), the first general story grammar that was designed to apply to a wide

variety of stories (Black & Wilensky, 1979). The next section will look in great depth at two early models of story grammars: Rumelhart's and Mandler and Johnson's.

### Figure 1

*Rumelhart's Structure of a Story* (Rand, 1982, p. 378)

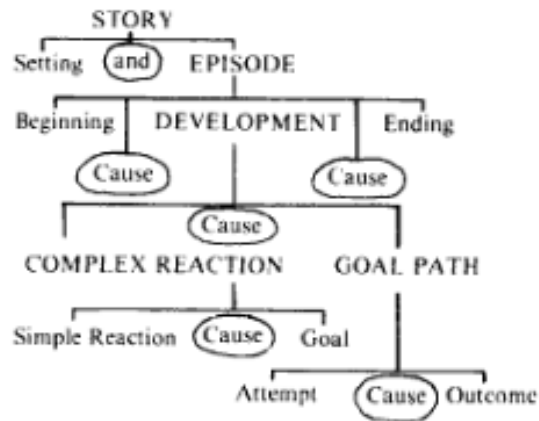


Rumelhart's "grammar is based on syntactical rules which generate the internal structure of stories and a corresponding set of semantic interpretation rules which determine the stories' semantic representation" (Rand, 1982, p. 378). Rumelhart believed that a story was comprised of a *setting* accompanied by an *episode*. The setting laid the framework in which the rest of the story would unfold (Rand, 1982).

Following Rumelhart's story grammar other general grammars emerged such as Mandler and Johnson (1977). According to Mandler and Johnson (as cited in Whaley, 1981), there are six main components to a story (see Figure 2): "*setting, beginning, reaction, attempt, outcome, and ending*" (p. 763). The *setting* introduces the main character and includes information regarding the background, time, and location. The *beginning* includes an initial event. The *reaction* is the character's response to the beginning and contriving of a goal. The *attempt* is the effort put forth to achieve the goal. The *outcome* refers to the results of the attempt (success or failure). The *ending* refers to the concluding response of the main character (Whaley, 1981).

**Figure 2**

*Mandler & Johnson's Structure of a Story* (Whaley, 1981, p. 763)



Another version of story grammar that emerged after Rumelhart's (1975) was Thorndyke's (1977). Thorndyke (1977) conducted one of the first studies on story grammar. In this study, he conducted a two part experiment on the "effects of structures and content variables on memory and comprehension of prose passages" (p. 77). In the first part of the experiment, participants read a passage of the same content but with varying structure: story, narrative after theme, narrative no theme or description. In the second part of the experiment, he presented two passages that both contained the same plot structure but modified characters and actions to vary semantic complexity and correctness. Thorndyke's (1977) main finding was as the amount of identifiable organizational structure in a passage was reduced, the comprehension and recall scores decreased. Therefore, when a passage follows a predictable sequence, participants are able to use an organizational structure to extract meaning (Thorndyke, 1977).

Although many different versions have emerged, all story grammars "guide individuals to look for important aspects of a story, to know when a portion of the story is complete and to anticipate certain types of information" (Whaley, 1981 p. 766). They are based around the idea that all stories follow generally the same structure: The main character encounters a problem; the

main character attempts to solve the problem; the problem is solved and the story wraps up. Stories vary in the number of attempts made to solve the problem or the addition of other characters. “Story grammars are, in essence, various schemes for formalizing this structure. The formalizations have usually but not always involved the use of rewriting rules which conveniently, and generativity, capture the relationships among the various pieces of such stories” (Rumelhart, 1980, p. 314).

### **Story Grammar Interventions**

In listening and reading comprehension, skilled comprehenders “create and integrate information to form a mental representation of text and apply strategies to build and refine these mental models” (Whalon et al., 2019, p. 2). How can we support learners when this complex and multifaceted phenomenon is not naturally occurring? Story Grammar provides a structure for students to tell and retell stories. The purpose of this section is to investigate the effects of Story Grammar (SG) interventions with exceptional learners.

Alves et al. (2015) investigated the impact of SG intervention on reading comprehension with students in grades three and five with a learning disability (LD). Many students with LDs struggle with reading comprehension. The main reason for this is that many students with LDs process information inefficiently and do not monitor or utilize comprehension strategies while reading. Alves et al. (2015) research questions were: “1) To what extent does a story grammar intervention with students in grade 3-5 with LD impact reading comprehension outcomes? 2) To what extent are these gains maintained over time?” (p. 76). Eight students in grades three and five participated in the study and were diagnosed with a learning disability or as a struggling reader. The intervention was a tier-two, small group intervention and took place twice a week over thirty minutes. Students were taught how to name and identify story grammar elements in order to

comprehend a variety of texts. The results of the study confirmed that direct instruction of SG elements has the ability to improve students with a LD reading comprehension skills. Limitations of the study included the small sample size, as well as, inconsistency of the intervention due to snow days and school events (Alves et al., 2015).

The goal of Miller et al.'s (2018) study was to explore effects on oral narrative skills utilizing a SG intervention paired with repeated retells on English learners (EL) with language impairments (LI). A comparison between typically developing children who are ELs and non-ELs demonstrated that grade two ELs narrative ability (including SG, sequencing and sentence complexity) scores were significantly lower. However, by grade 5 these discrepancies vanished with ELs scores on par with their non-EL peers (Miller et al., 2018). However, ELs with a LI demonstrated difficulties with narratives in both languages. Miller et al. (2018) "hypothesized that a SG intervention paired with repeated retells could improve narrative organization skills, increase narrative productivity as measured by the total number of words (TNW) and the total number of different words (NDW), and improve syntactic complexity as measured by mean length of utterance (MLUW) in words for EL's with LI" (p. 16). The participants were two female and two male Spanish-speaking EL's with LI in grades three and four. The instruction took place in a one-on-one setting during thirty-minute intervention sessions, three times per week. The interventionist utilized a variety of storybooks along with Story Grammar Marker® to support students' retelling. The results demonstrated that all four students' narrative organization and MLUW scores increased but TNW and NDW did not increase. Limitations of this study include the small sample size and whether similar findings would be found in students whose first language is a language other than Spanish. The findings indicated that an SG intervention coupled with repeated retells is

potentially a worthwhile intervention for students who are ELs with a LI to improve narrative organization skills (Miller et al., 2018).

The goal of Whalon et al.'s (2019) study was to determine the validity of a SG intervention with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Whalon et al. (2019) stated that children with ASD generally develop decoding skills but perform poorly in the area of comprehension, especially inferencing. Whalon et al. (2019) research question was, "What is the effect of an adapted Story Grammar (SG) intervention on the listening comprehension of young children with ASD (K-2)?" (p. 2). Five male students in kindergarten to grade two with a medical diagnosis of ASD participated in the study. The intervention program took place in a one-on-one setting. The interventionist read a high-interest picture book to the student and followed a series of scripted questions before, during and after reading. All participants showed steady improvement with their most significant progress in the final intervention phase (Whalon et al., 2019). Based on the findings, SG could be a worthwhile tier-one intervention that supports comprehension growth in learners with ASD. Although results proved SG to be an effective intervention, Whalon et al. (2019) argued, students with ASD need more than solely the SG intervention to improve their text understanding, as there are many more skills proficient readers have that need to be explicitly taught to students with ASD. A comprehensive approach that includes SG but also vocabulary instruction, text monitoring and activating background knowledge may be the most effective way in reaching students with ASD (Whalon et al., 2019). One limitation of the study was that maintenance data was not collected; therefore, it is unknown if students were able to maintain the skills taught in the SG intervention (Whalon et al., 2019).

All of the researchers in these studies examined the effectiveness of a SG intervention for students with exceptionalities. First, Alves et al. (2015) investigated the impact of SG intervention

on reading comprehension with students in grades three and five with a LD. Second, Miller et al. (2018) utilized a SG intervention paired with repeated retells on EL with LI to explore the impact on oral narrative skills. Finally, Whalon et al. (2019) determined the validity of a SG intervention with students with ASD. All studies proved SG to be an effective intervention at RTI tier-two and three for improving students with exceptionalities oral narrative skills and/or reading comprehension.

### **The *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® Approach**

*Braidy, the StoryBraid*® is a multi-sensory tool utilized to scaffold oral narrative development in the early childhood setting. *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® was founded by MindWing Concepts, Inc.®. The founder, Maryellen Rooney Moreau, is a Speech-Language Pathologist with an interest in the connection between oral language and literacy. Over the past 25 years, she has taught and developed courses in Speech and Language Development at the American International College in Springfield, Massachusetts in the United States. In 1991, after years of extensive research, Moreau created *Story Grammar Marker*® a tool similar to *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® but aimed at children in grades two to six. In 1992, she developed *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® which targets specifically early childhood. Currently, Moreau presents at professional development workshops across the United States and Canada. Her materials are being used in classrooms in North and South America, Europe, Iceland Taiwan, and Australia (Mindwing Concepts, Inc.®, 2020).

In 2003, Westby conducted a review of *Story Grammar Marker*®. Westby recognizes the importance of strong communication skills. In order to foster the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of storytelling Westby (2003) described the process in her review:

Telling stories puts a tremendous load on working memory because students must engage in several activities simultaneously. When children tell a story, they must keep in mind the overall gist of the story they are telling while simultaneously organizing each utterance, linking the utterances together in a temporal/causal sequence, and making certain that all utterances link to the theme and overall organization of the story. The Story Grammar Marker® reduces the load on working memory by externalizing the global structure and sequence of components in stories. This allows students to concentrate on translating their ideas into words and sentences to convey the content of each element of the story. When using the SGM®, they do not have to keep in mind where they are in the story. (para. 6)

*Braidy, the StoryBraid*® (see Figure 3) is a visual and tactile tool used to support children in retelling and oral narratives. The design represents a typical four-year-olds developmental stage of a person drawing, with the arms and legs coming out of the head. The arms are for wearing around the neck or waist of the child or teacher during storytelling. The legs are two braids. Each strand of the braid represents one of six strands of language. The left leg has five green rings, which make up the action sequence while the right leg houses the rest of the icons. The kinaesthetic icons help children remember the important parts of a story (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). For a detailed description of all the icons that are used to support retelling and oral narratives see Appendix A.



**Figure 3**

*Braidy, the StoryBraid®* (MindWing Concepts, Inc.®, 2020)

***Six Strands of Language***

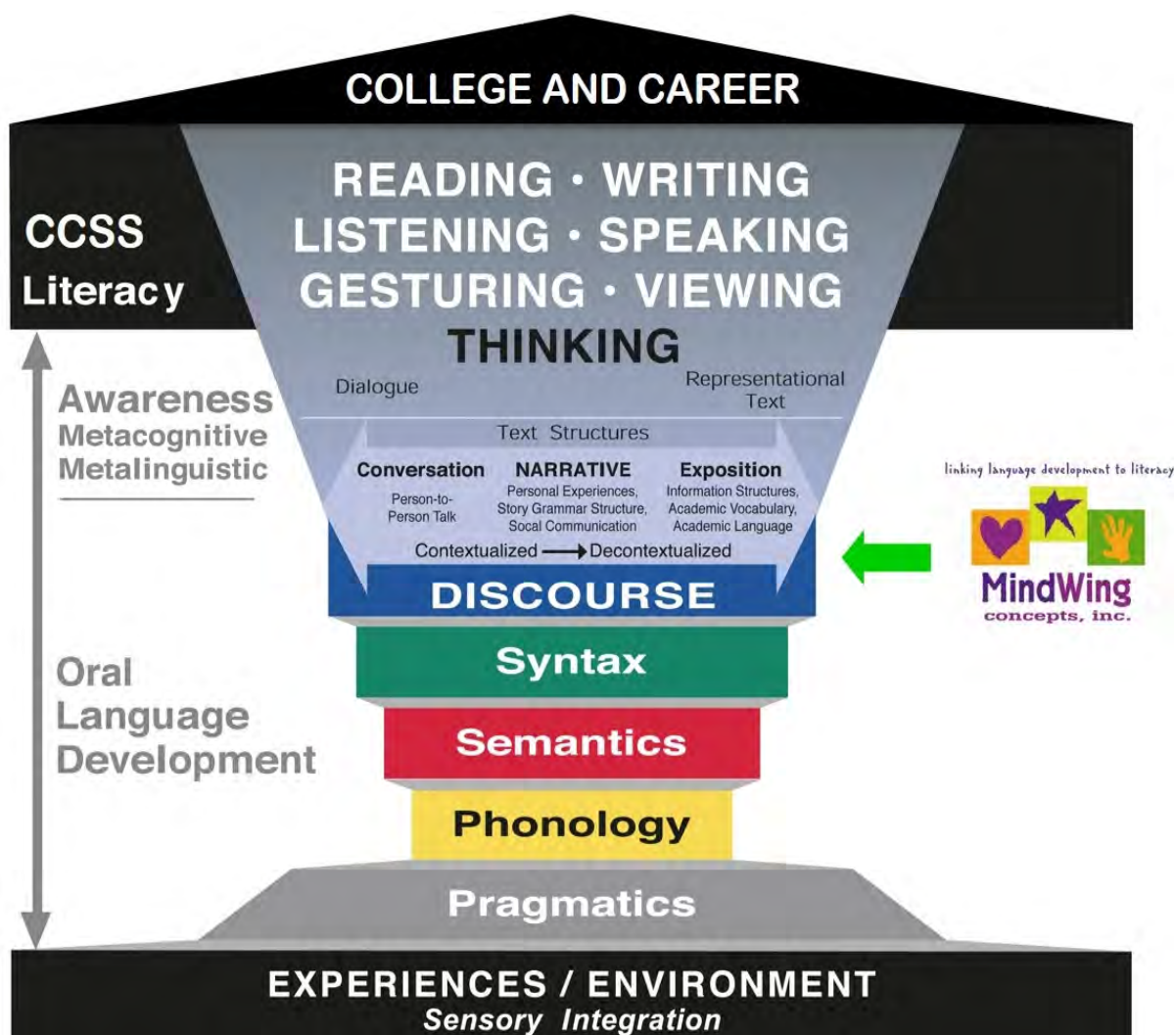
*Braidy, the StoryBraid®* focuses on developing the six strands of language: pragmatics, phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse and metalinguistics (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). These six strands of language provide the framework in which all MindWings methodology is built upon (MindWing Concepts, Inc.®, 2020). They are building blocks for all areas of literacy development including reading, writing, listening, speaking, gesturing, viewing and thinking (see Figure 4).

Moreau and Fidrych (2008) propose:

Discourse in all its forms—conversation, narration, exposition—is vital to the connection between oral language development and literacy. Unless students can comprehend and independently express what they have comprehended orally and in writing, they are at risk academically and socially. (p. 15)

**Figure 4**

“Building Blocks of Literacy” (MindWing Concepts, Inc.®, 2020)



The next section will explain each level of language and how they have provided the framework for *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®.

**Pragmatics.** Pragmatics refers to the “social uses of language” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 20). This level of language includes verbal and nonverbal cues. Verbal cues include commenting, tone of voice, asking for clarification and ability to stay on topic. Nonverbal cues

include eye contact, body language, space, feedback (nodding or smiling to express interest). This level of language is often highly influenced by cultural expectations (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

**Phonology.** Phonology refers to “the sound system” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 21).

Phonology encompasses spelling, phonemic awareness, and articulation. Spelling is the ability to represent words using letters and sounds. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate phonemes. Phonemic awareness includes rhyming, blending, segmenting and categorizing.

Articulation is the ability to say words so they are clearly understood by others (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

**Semantics.** Semantics is the understanding, meaning and uses for words. This level includes understanding the multiple meanings of words, figurative and academic language. It includes one's schema or use of background knowledge to understand a topic. Semantics also includes the relationship between words in a sentence and using words to relate to ideas. For example, I sleep on a \_\_\_\_\_. Or I like **winter** because I like to **snowshoe** (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

**Syntax.** Syntax refers to the movement “from simple to complex sentences” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 21). This level of language refers to the structure of sentences. It includes word order, cohesive ties, verb tense, suffixes, combining sentences and morphology. Word order refers to combining words to formulate simple, complex and compound sentences. Cohesive ties refers to the ability to join ideas. Verb tense is the ability to use consistent tense (past, present or future). Sentence combining refers to the ability to join simple sentences to create complex or compound sentences. Morphology is the use of suffixes (-ing, -ed, -es, etc.) to change word tense (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

**Discourse.** Discourse refers to the transition from “spoken to written communication” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 21). Discourse level language refers to conversation, exposition, and

narrative. Conversation is the ability to orally share with others. Exposition is understanding and utilizing academic language. Narrative refers to recounting an experience, retelling and generating a story (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

**Metalinguistics.** Metalinguistics is “the conscious awareness of language” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 21). Metalinguistics refers to rhyme, perspective, self-monitoring, figurative language, segmentation, and manipulation. Rhyme is the ability to identify rhyme patterns. Perspective is the ability to see other perspectives in situations. Self-monitoring is the ability to self-correct. Figurative language is using words beyond their literal meaning. This includes metaphors, similes, personifications, and hyperboles. Segmentation is the ability to hear syllables in words, break down sentences, and recognize words in sentences. Manipulation is the ability to play with language, for example omitting or moving parts of words (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

### ***Story Grammar in the Primary Grades***

The *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® approach “links language development to literacy for children from preschool through second grade by providing a means to explicitly teach and model literate language” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 2). *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® appeals to early childhood students through its visual, tactile and kinesthetic approach. It follows a developmental sequence of language acquisition that breaks down oral narratives and storytelling. The lessons target oral language competence through the use of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® doll, various picture book read alouds and other hands-on activities.

### **Chapter Summary**

A proficient narrative is the telling or retelling of a story utilizing logically sequenced events and the inclusion of essential story elements (Brown et al., 2014). Story grammars aim to provide a structure for narrative skills. The first story grammar emerged in the 1970s and has been

continually evolving since (Black & Wilensky, 1979). Based on current research, the story grammar approach has been proven effective in improving children with exceptionalities oral narrative development and reading comprehension. *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* is one approach to story grammar that I have chosen to explore in-depth and review its effectiveness. Next, chapter 3 describes the design and data collection tools used in the study as well as the process for data analysis.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

First, this chapter discusses the value of using a case study method. Next, the recruitment methods, participants and setting of the study are discussed. In addition, details of the intervention are explained. The process of data collection along with a synopsis of how the data was analyzed follows. Finally, the chapter reviews ethical considerations concluding with the value and limitations of the study.

#### Research Design – Case Study

Merriam (2009) describes a case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit” (p. 203). Case studies investigate cause and effect, involving people's lived experiences. A case study provides an in-depth description, presenting thoughts and feelings that would be evoked in a specific situation. A case study is shaped by the role/function, organizational/institutional arrangements and individuals within the group being studied (Cohen et al., 2007). A case study was a valuable approach in this research because it allowed me as, the researcher, to seek out the value of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® approach while staying close to the naturally occurring events as they unfolded in my classroom.

Case studies hold value that other research methods are not able to provide. They appeal to a greater audience as they are generally written in common language. In some instances, case studies can provide further insight and depth into other similar situations or occurrences. Their insight and depth also allows one to fully understand the situation, which may be lost in larger-scale studies (Cohen et al., 2007). Findings from this study can be used to support educators in making an informed decision on if *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® will be the right fit for their students.

Finally, case studies are manageable for a researcher to take on independently (Cohen et al., 2007). I was able to carry out my case study in a rural setting with minimal additional resources.

The purpose of my study was to explore how the program *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* could be used as a tier-one approach to support the development of students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories. The research question that guided this inquiry asked: *How effective is the Braidy, the StoryBraid® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories?* The data collection goals were to look at students' work and reflect on the use of the program to improve my students' language development. I used the findings to make decisions to improve my teaching and to inform a possible decision for my school or district to endorse the program as a tier-one tool to support oral language development. The following sub-questions guided the implementation of the program and study: (1) *How does a teacher implement Braidy, the StoryBraid® as a tier-one oral language support?* As I delivered the program I read the teachers' manual to become as familiar as possible with the program and techniques involved; and, (2) *Will this program fit the needs of my students?* As the researcher, I wrote down my reflections and observations throughout the implementation of the program. Student work samples (drawing/writing) were collected and stored in a locked cabinet in the schools' main office until the study was complete. I cross-referenced my notes with the lessons' intent, as indicated in the teacher's manual. Finally, I will share the findings with colleagues, in hopes that my study will support educators in developing a repertoire of tier-one oral language development programs.

### **Participants**

I, the researcher, recruited the participants from my classroom. The invitation to participate in the research was extended to all students in the class. The researcher/classroom

teacher sent home a letter to parents (see Appendix B) in early December describing the study and requesting assent and consent. Parents/guardians were informed that the implementation of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program was part of the regular programming for all children but participation in the study was voluntary. The parents/guardians were given two weeks to return the assent and consent form (see Appendix C). The consent forms were returned in a sealed envelope and stored in the school's locked filing cabinet until completion of the study. Parents/guardians were encouraged to contact the researcher regarding any questions or concerns. The school's phone number was given out as a contact number. The researcher was available to answer questions over the phone, face to face or through email. Parents/guardians were given full disclosure regarding the components of the study.

As the classroom teacher, the participants were my students. Thirteen of the students in my class returned signed consent forms and participated in the research. The participants were in kindergarten, grades one or two and between the ages of five to eight years old. A majority of the students were designated ELL and three students received Speech and Language services. I have taught many of the students years prior. I have taught grade one and two students since kindergarten. I have maintained a professional relationship with many of the parents/guardians for several years as many of my current students have had older siblings in my class.

### **Setting**

All research activities involving participants took place in the classroom during regular instruction. Lessons took place within school hours during the regularly scheduled language arts time. Although not all students consented to participate in the study, all students participated in *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lessons. Students participated in 20 to 30-minute sessions, three to four



times per week for approximately eight weeks. Lessons 1 to 37 of the program were completed with my class.

### **Overview of the Study**

The study took place over the course of seven months, beginning in November and concluding in May 2020 (see Table 1). The study began by seeking the approval of the Research Ethics Board at Vancouver Island University. Once approval was granted, a letter was sent to the school district and school principal providing an overview and explaining the study (see Appendix D). Next, a letter was sent home to parents/guardians explaining the study (see Appendix B) and requesting assent/consent (see Appendix C). Families were given one month to return consent/assent forms prior to beginning the study. During this time they were encouraged to contact the researcher if they had questions or concerns regarding the study. The study began in January 2020 and took place over the course of eight weeks in the researcher's classroom as a part of regularly scheduled language arts lessons. Lessons 1-37 were completed from the mini-lesson sequence in the *Braidy the StoryBraid*® manual. During lessons, the researcher collected personal reflections and observations in the journal of the researcher (see Appendix E), recorded student responses in the lesson notes (see Appendix F) and collected students' work, including drawings/writing samples. Digital data was stored in Microsoft Word on the researcher's personal, password-protected computer. The hard copy of data including lesson notes and student work samples was stored in a locked filing cabinet of the school's office. Once the lessons were completed the researcher brought all data home to analyze, interpret and complete the writing of the thesis. Finally, the master's thesis will be shared on VIUSpace and a link will be shared with interested parents/guardians and colleagues.

**Table 1***Overview of Study*

Date	Engagement with Participants
Beginning of November	Application and approval by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board.
End of November	Letter sent to school principal/school districts' director of instruction explaining the study (see Appendix D).
December	<i>Recruitment of Participants.</i> Letter sent home to parents/guardians (see Appendix B) explaining the study and requesting parent/guardian consent and student assent (see Appendix C).
January & February	One mini-lesson per day, three to four days per week for eight weeks. Approximately twenty to thirty minutes was allotted per lesson. Collect personal reflections and observations, record student responses and collect students' work, including drawings/writing samples.
February & March	Analyze the data and complete writing thesis.
May	My master's thesis will be shared to VIUSpace. I will also share the link to my master's thesis to parents and colleagues who are interested.

**Data Collection**

The data collected in the study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Interviewing, analyzing

and observing are central to this style of research. My data collection centrally focused on observation and analysis of student work samples.

Observation is best utilized when “an activity, event, or situation can be observed first hand, when a fresh perspective is desired, or when participants are not able or willing to discuss the topic under study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). Through observation, the researcher can gain in-depth access to knowledge and gain authentic information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). “A major purpose of observation is to see firsthand what is going on rather than simply assume we know. We go into a setting, observe, and describe what we observe” (Patton, 2015, p. 331). Without physically experiencing a program we will never fully understand it (Patton, 2015).

The relationship between the observer and the observed can range from being a *complete participant* to a *complete observer*. My role fell into the middle, as a *participant as an observer*. This is a “data-collection technique that requires the researcher to be present at, involved in and actually recording the routine daily activities with people in the field setting while maintaining an active participant role” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 144). In my role as a *participant as an observer*, I maintained my active participation as a classroom teacher through instructing *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* lessons while recording lesson notes during the lessons and completing a journal entry after each lesson.

In the role of *the participant as an observer*, the researcher is both an insider and an outsider. In this role, there needs to be a balance “experiencing the program as an insider accentuates the participant part of the participant observation. At the same time, the inquirer remains aware of being an outsider. The challenge is to “combine participation and observation to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders” (Patton, 2015, p. 338).

Data was collected through three methods: lesson notes, journal of the researcher and students' drawing/writing samples. The following section will outline each data collection method.

### ***Lesson Notes***

The lesson notes were completed as *a reflection in action*, “immediate, short-term, concerned with technical efficiency, restructuring a specific situation in terms of a new frame” (Morrison, 1996, p. 318). During lessons, I had a clipboard with the lesson notes template and a pencil (see Appendix F). This was a place to record observations and students' comments during lessons. I organized lesson notes by noting the date and lesson number. I tracked the start and finish time of the lesson as well as took short notes regarding student comments, student engagement and general observations/comments as needed during the lesson. The lesson notes were stored in the school's locked filing cabinet.

### ***Journal of the Researcher***

The journal of the researcher is an example of *reflection on action*, “untrammelled by immediate practical problems, can clarify, understand and interpret meanings, intentions, actions through engaging the theoretical underpinnings of the practices and personal development” (Morrison, 1996, p. 318). Journal writing supports teachers in becoming more aware of their contribution to events occurring in the classroom. It can “slow down [the teachers] thinking and reasoning process to become more aware” (Larrivee, 2000, p.298).

The journal of the researcher was a digital journal on Microsoft Word. This journal was stored on my personal, password-protected computer. The focus of the journal of the researcher was an important data collection tool and allowed me to reflect and analyze the program and lessons. There was no student-specific information. In the journal of the researcher, I recorded the date, lesson number, lesson intent and length followed by a reflection (see Appendix E).

Reflections were completed after each lesson. My reflection was guided by the following questions: (1) Was the lesson clear, manageable and related to the lesson intent? (2) Did the lesson build upon prior knowledge from previous lessons? (3) Was the lesson content appropriate for the students' needs? Did it allow for differentiation to meet the needs of all students'? (4) How did students demonstrate their learning in this lesson? Was this an effective method? (5) What were the overall strengths of the lesson? And, (6) What were the overall weaknesses of the lesson?

### ***Students' Drawing/Writing Samples***

As part of the regular classroom teaching, in some lessons, students were required to record their thinking through either drawing or writing. Students' drawing/writing samples were collected and stored in the school's locked filing cabinet until data collection was complete. The researcher collected and stored data (writing/drawing samples) for all students indiscriminately until the end of the study (Lesson 1–37 of the program). At the end of the data collection period, the researcher found out who had given assent and consent, looked through the samples and removed students who did not participate. The researcher went through her notes and crossed off any data that did not correspond to participants. Only data from students whose parents/guardians had given assent/consent were included in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analysed through the use of formatting, cross-referral, coding, locators and abstracting (Rumrill et al., 2011). Next, each data analysis method is described..

#### ***Formatting***

Data recorded in the journal of the researcher and lesson notes were formatted, following a consistent structure (Rumrill et al., 2011). The format is laid out in Appendices E and F. The

lesson notes were kept in a notebook. The journal of the researcher was kept in Microsoft Word on the researcher's password-protected computer.

### ***Cross-referral***

The student work samples, journal of the researcher and lesson notes were able to easily link together through the lesson number (Rumrill et al., 2011). The student work samples, the journal of the research and lesson notes were grouped and labeled according to the lesson number.

### ***Coding***

Once all data was collected, codes emerged that were developed into categories. Data was further analyzed to search for additional occurrences that support each category (Rumrill et al., 2011).

### ***Locators***

In the lesson notes and journal of the researcher, specific lesson numbers/question numbers were utilized as locators for information regarding a particular category in the coding process (Rumrill et al., 2011).

### ***Abstracting***

Once categories had emerged, journal entries, lesson notes, student dialog and work samples that pertained to categories were abstracted. Lengthy material was condensed into information pertaining to a particular category (Rumrill et al., 2011).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participation in the program was not for the benefit of the study but part of the students' regular language arts programming. All students received the same instruction and support whether they participated in the study or not. There was no direct benefit for participation in the

study. However, I hoped that there would be benefits in students' retelling and story developing skills as a result of participating in *Braidy, the Storybraid*® lessons and activities.

Students were not placed in a vulnerable circumstance because of my research. However, as a classroom teacher and researcher, I consistently used positive feedback and encouragement with all students. I was aware of students' needs and adapted as necessary throughout the delivery of the program.

Even though participation was voluntary and the researcher did not know who participated until the end of the data collection period, it was possible that students or parents may have felt some degree of pressure to participate in the study. The consent letter clearly indicated the voluntary nature of the study and that the researcher would not be aware of who participated until the end of the study. It also indicated parents and students had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without having to provide a reason or without repercussions. Additionally, the consent letter indicated that all participant information used in the study would be coded.

Hardcopies containing any information related to the study were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the school's office. Upon completion of the study, hardcopies were promptly brought to the researcher's home and stored in the researcher's locked filing cabinet. Digital copies containing any information related to the study were stored on the researchers, personal, password-protected computer. Information related to the study was backed up on an external hard drive. No information was stored on Internet databases.

### **Limitations**

The knowledge that was generated within my case study was limited in several ways. Findings resulting from a case study may not be generalizable beyond the specific case unless other readers and researchers see particular applications (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, the

value of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® was assessed specifically within the context of the grades and demographics of particular students within my case. Case studies are open to researcher bias. As a result, interpretations are personal, subjective and selective (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, interpretations within my case study were limited as they belonged to me, the teacher-researcher.



## Chapter 4

### Findings

This chapter describes the findings of the case study conducted with my class of kindergarten, grade 1 and 2 students. The *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence was utilized. The mini-lesson sequence is comprised of 70 lessons. It is a flexible and systematic approach that supports facilitators in building children's oral language skills. The lessons explicitly teach and model narrative discourse macrostructure and microstructure (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). For the purpose of this study, I completed 37 of the 70 lessons in the mini-lesson sequence. Qualitative data was collected through lesson notes, journal of the researcher, students' comments and students' drawing/writing samples. Within my class, 13 students and their parents consented to share comments and drawing and writing samples. Participants are identified with alphabetic codes to protect their identity. The case study intends to explore the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program in relation to how it promotes students' development of oral language and skills. The findings respond to the following research question: *How effective is the Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories? Coding was done on each lesson and all other data associated with the lesson including lesson notes, journal of the researcher, student comments and drawing and writing samples. After coding each individual lesson and all data associated, four major categories emerged. First, category one organizes lessons according to their stage in the narrative developmental sequence. Next, category two pertains to the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lessons. After, category three asserts the codes related to the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lesson layout. Finally, category four addresses the codes related to the student responses toward the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program.

**Category One: Narrative Developmental Sequence**

Moreau and Zagula (2008) present the oral narrative developmental sequence in a series of five stages. Stage one is labels and descriptions. Stage two is the action sequence. Stage three is the reactive sequence. Stage four is the psychological cause/effect. Stage five is the complete episode (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). In Lessons 1-37 of the mini-lesson sequence, the stages were completely addressed, partially addressed or not addressed at all. The following section will outline the goal for each stage, present where lessons fit into the oral narrative developmental stages and the capacity in which the goal was addressed.

***Stage One: Labels and Descriptions***

In stage one, the child is able to give a descriptive sequence including the character and setting. The oral language goal at this stage is the “child can dictate a “story” that labels and describes the Characters and Action expected within the Setting, (script). The child comprehends situations and “stories” involving Characters and Settings” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 46). This section will be broken up into the three key features at this stage. First, the child gives a simple physical description of characters. Second, the child gives a simple physical description of the setting. Third, the child mentions actions but not necessarily in sequence (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). This section will present the lessons that supported this goal through findings in the journal of the researcher, lesson notes, students’ comments and students’ drawing/writing samples.

**Physical Description of the Characters.** Lessons 1-8, 12-14, 16-18, 20, 21, 26 and 32-35 address physical descriptions of characters. In Lesson 2, students began developing an awareness of what a character is. In this lesson, students were introduced to a simple song that gave a physical description of a character:

Braidy is a character,

Brady is a character,

Eyes, face, and head,

Eyes, face, and head

(Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 33)

This song teaches students the three defining attributes of a basic character: eyes, face, and head.

Following the introduction of this song, I asked the discussion question, “What is a character?”

Student G suggested, “Something that’s pretend.” Student M added, “Yea, like they make books for you and make a story with them” (Lesson Notes, January 8, 2020). After the discussion

students demonstrated their understanding by drawing or writing a familiar character. Through the drawing and writing samples, it appeared students did not fully understand what a character was.

Student P drew two flowers with grass (see Figure 5). When asked about the character Student P pointed to one of the flowers. When I reminded Student P of the character song, Student P went

back and drew a person. As part of my ongoing formative assessment, I concluded that the

discussion, drawing and writing activity demonstrated that students were at the preliminary stages of character understanding.

### Figure 5

#### *Example Character Drawing*



Lesson 26 continued with physical descriptions of characters. After a few lessons utilizing *Clifford and the Big Storm*, we established that Clifford is a big, red dog. Students were asked to brainstorm words for big. Students came up with the words: wide, humongous, large, long, giant, strong and huge. A few students suggested: elephant, bear and buffalo. As part of my assessment I concluded, these suggestions showed that some students were able to make associations with the word big but not yet able to come up with another word for big. In my journal I shared:

When students were brainstorming other words for 'big' some students started naming big things. It was an effective way to clear up misconceptions of 'big'. For some students, it was a bit of a challenging concept to grasp. Sharing other words for big supported language exposure for all students. I could see myself using this lesson in other units and for other words. (Journal of the Researcher, February 6, 2020)

In lessons 32-35, students were asked to apply their knowledge of a character (characters have eyes, face and head) to identify characters. Students used magazines to cut out pictures of characters and created a collaborative collage (see Figure 6). The following is a conversation with a student who initially required support in identifying characters but gained independence later in the lesson:

*Student S: Is this a character? (Pointing to a picture of a tree)*

*Teacher: Does it have eyes, face and head?*

*Student S: No.*

*Teacher: Ok keep looking, let's see if we can find a character with eyes, face and head.*

*Student S: Oh! Here is one! (Points to a picture of a dog)*

*Teacher: Yes! You found a character.*

*Minutes later Student S came back to me with the magazine.*

*Student S: Look! I found lots of them. (Points to a picture with lots of people)*

*Teacher: Yes, you certainly did find lots of characters!*

(Lesson Notes, February 27, 2020)



story they tiptoed up to the pocket chart and put it in. After we completed this activity, misconceptions around characters became apparent during the discussion:

*Teacher: Are there any more characters?*

*Student H: The mom that reads the book. Her is a character.*

*Teacher: Is the person that reads the book a character?*

*Student M: No they make the characters.*

*Student I: But she has eyes and a face.*

*Student M: Mrs. F. reads us books and she is not a character.*

*Student E: The person that makes the book. He is a character.*

*Teacher: Hmm...*

*Student B: No! That's the author.*

*Teacher: Yes, the person that writes the words is the author. The person that creates the pictures is the illustrator.*

*Student M: Yea so they make the character in the book.*

*Teacher: Yes, the author and illustrator makes the characters.*

*Student F: Yes! The characters are with the eyes, face and head in the book.*

(Lesson Notes, February 9, 2020)

As per my ongoing assessment, this discussion made me realize that there are still some misconceptions around what a character is and what a character is not. I took some time to reflect on this conversation:

This conversation fascinated me. Student H was using our basic attributes of a character (eyes, face and head) to define a character. Based on these attributes “the mom reading the book” is a character. In order to continue to clear up this misconception, in future lessons, we go over that characters must be a part of the story. (Journal of the Researcher, February 8, 2020)

**Physical Description of the Setting.** Lessons 36 - 37 connected the characters to a setting. These lessons built upon Lesson 35 (described above), continuing to utilize the book *Over in the Meadow*. In this lesson we listened and watched the book again on YouTube. As each character was introduced we stopped the book to describe the setting. After this activity, students chose one character from the story and drew a picture of that character in its setting (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7**

*Example of a Character in its Setting*



*Note.* Drawing is of a lizard by the old mossy gate.

As part of my ongoing assessment, after collecting the drawing samples, I concluded that students were able to accurately draw their characters in the appropriate setting (see Figure 7).

**Actions Mentioned but not Necessarily in Sequence.** This key feature was addressed during Lessons 14 – 20 based around *Clifford and the Big Storm* and also arose naturally during a separate oral language activity. After multiple reads of *Clifford and the Big Storm*, the students drew a picture of a character and wrote something that the character did in the story. I used this activity as part of my ongoing, formative assessment of where students were at in their understanding of actions. Student M was able to make a general statement: “He can save things that you really want” (see Figure 8). In *Clifford and the Big Storm*, Clifford saves many people and things during the storm, this was an accurate description of what Clifford does in the story.

**Figure 8.***Student M's Drawing/Writing Sample*

*Note.* Student M's writing, "Clifford is a big red dog. He can save things you really want."

Student C wrote, "Grandma and Elizabeth came but we did not see Clifford surprise!" (see Figure 9). Student C's picture is of Clifford hiding behind the house/sand with Grandma and Elizabeth standing together. I concluded that student C was referring to the end of the story when Clifford hides behind a pile of sand and surprises Grandma and Elizabeth when they come home. Through assessing student C's picture and description, it appeared that there was a connection between the characters and their actions.



**Figure 9.***Student C's Drawing/Writing Sample*

*Note.* Student C's writing, "Grandma and Elizabeth came but we did not see Clifford surprise!"

One of the richest discussions around characters occurred naturally outside of formal *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* instruction. This discussion occurred following Lesson 35, during an oral language activity that occurred routinely each morning in small groups. In this oral language activity, students were shown a picture of two children looking at a book and given the prompt "What are the children looking at?"

*Student M: Characters.*

*Teacher: Oh very interesting. What characters do you think they are looking at?*

*Student M: I think they might be looking at characters like a rhino or a dinosaur.*

*Student B: Yea like characters can do different stuff. So like maybe they are doing stuff.*

*Student P: Maybe a pig character named Rosie! She could be in the barn in the mud with her friends.*

(Lesson Notes, February 8, 2020)

According to my formative assessment, this conversation demonstrated that students were developing an understanding of the information taught in *Braidy the StoryBraid®* lessons. I was excited to see that students were applying their knowledge to a related context outside of *Braidy the StoryBraid®* lessons.

There were a wide variety of activities that covered this oral language goal, especially in the area of describing characters. The labels and descriptions goal was fully addressed in my teaching through Lessons 1 - 8, 12 - 21, 26 and 32 - 37 of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* mini-lesson sequence.

### ***Stage Two: Action Sequence***

Stage two: action sequence builds upon stage one: description sequence. The oral language goal in this stage is:

Child can dictate a “story” with a sequence of Actions. The objective is to develop temporal organization. These “stories” have a theme but not a plot. The child comprehends situations and stories involving Characters, Settings and a sequence of Actions. (Moreau & Zagula, 2008)

This section will focus on the key feature of this goal - sequencing actions.

**Sequencing Actions.** Moreau and Zagula (2008) refer to the actions as the “doers” or the things that the character does. In this Lesson 11, we discussed that rings on Braidy® help tell us what a character does. We began by brainstorming what a dog does - barks, runs, plays, eats, sleeps, walks and plays. We used a ring to represent each thing a dog does. Next, we practiced identifying actions in the book *Mean Jean the Recess Queen*. During the book, we stopped to identify actions or the things Jean does in the book. We identified three actions:

1. Jean pushed kids down.
2. Jean jumps with Katie Sue.
3. Jean was running to Katie Sue and having too much fun.

(Lesson Notes, January 28, 2020)

As students stated Jeans' actions, we added a ring to Braidy®. Each ring represented one of Jeans' actions in the story. Following this lesson, I noted: “The character does more than three things in the story. How do we teach students to recognize the important actions of the character? Some of the characters' actions are not as important as others” (Journal of the Researcher, January 28, 2020).

The following day, we completed an action sequence for getting ready for school using Braidy® and the rings:

*Student B: First your mom wakes you up.*

*Student C: Or your alarm wakes you up!*

*Student D: You put on clothes.*

*Student F: Eat some cereal!*

*Student B: Get your jacket and boots on.*

*Student G: Get your backpack and get on the bus.*

(Lesson Notes, January 29, 2020)

As we retold the sequence, we pulled down a ring on Brady® to model that each action is represented by a ring. After completing this activity, one student brought up that not everyone does the same thing in the morning. In order to address this comment, students took turns sharing how they got ready for school, adding a ring to Braidy® each time they said an action.

The students were explicitly taught to action sequence through telling and retelling. The action sequencing goal was fully addressed in my teaching through Lessons 11 and 12 of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* mini-lesson sequence.

### ***Stage Three: Reactive Sequence***

The oral language goal for stage three is “When prompted, using picture book sequences, the child can dictate a “story” using an Initiating Event and a Reaction. The child comprehends situations and “stories” involving Characters, Settings, an Initiating Event and a Reaction” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 46). In this stage, a layer of complexity is added, as students are not

only listing the actions but also identifying reactions to them (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). This goal was not addressed in my teaching because the concept did not take place during the data collection stage (Lessons 1-37).

#### ***Stage Four: Psychological Cause/Effect***

The oral language goal in stage four is “The child begins to relate Internal Responses (Feelings) to the Initiating Event. The child comprehends situations and “stories” involving Characters, Settings, Initiating Events and Internal Responses to the Initiating Events ” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 47). In this stage, Initiating Events and Internal Response are introduced as the focus begins to shift to feelings.

**Focus on Feelings.** Lessons 9 and 10 focused on identifying and describing feelings. The *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* manual lists six universal emotions: happy, sad, mad, scared, disgusted and surprised (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). The *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* kit includes accessories that the facilitator can use interchangeably to display the six universal emotions on Braidy® (Moreau & Zagula, 2008).

In Lesson 9, we began by identifying the six universal emotions. Then we used Braidy® and the accessories to interchange and display the emotions. Next, students shared situations where they felt one of the universal emotions. Student B shared, “I felt scared when I first went to my uncle and aunt’s house in Prince Rupert and I didn’t know anybody but after my cousins played with me I wasn’t scared anymore” (Lesson Notes, January 9, 2020).

In Lesson 10, we began by reviewing the six universal emotions. Next, we read *Arthur’s Chicken Pox*. Prior to reading the story, students were prompted to think about how Arthur felt in the story. Once we began reading, students immediately picked up on emotions Arthur may have been feeling. At one point student G prompted the class, “I think we need to change Braidy®.

Arthur is not sad anymore. He is happy now” (Lesson Notes, January 9, 2020). After this Lesson, I reflected:

The emphasis on the “why” or “something happens” to make you feel an emotion emphasized understanding the character’s emotions in the story. It was very clear that students were beginning to recognize that the character’s emotions change throughout the story. (Journal of the Researcher, January 29, 2020)

This goal was partially addressed in my teaching because the concept of Internal Response was introduced in Lessons 9 and 10 but the concept of Initiating Events did not take place during the data collection stage (Lessons 1-37).

#### ***Stage Five: Development of Plot***

The language goal for stage five is “the child begins to tell a Complete Episode containing the following story grammar components and a variety of cohesive ties” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 47). This stage builds on stages one to four with the addition of identifying the beginning, middle and end. This goal was not addressed in my teaching because the concept did not take place during the data collection stage (Lessons 1-37).

#### **Category Two: *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® Lessons**

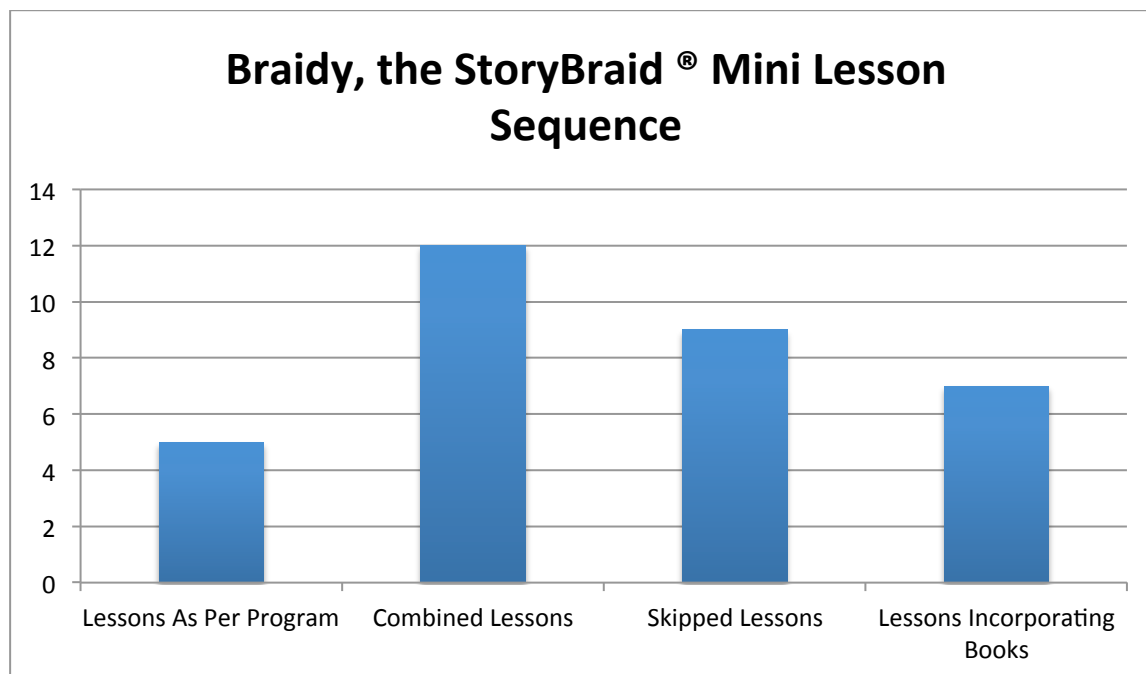
The authors of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual encouraged flexibility within the administration of the program:

As you begin to use these mini-lessons, we encourage you to supplement them with lessons of your own. There is no specific timetable for implementation. Our goal is to present a systematic framework for instruction and/or intervention in a classroom or any therapeutic setting. Flexibility is necessary! (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 86)

Throughout the delivery of the program, adjustments to the lessons were made in response to the needs of my students. Lessons were followed as per program, combined, skipped and incorporated books (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10**

*Braidy, the StoryBraid® Mini-Lesson Sequence*



### ***Lessons as Per Program***

A total of five lessons were followed as per the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* mini-lesson sequence in the program manual (see Figure 10). Lessons 1, 2, 16, 36 and 37 were followed as per the program. In three of the five lessons (Lessons 1, 16 and 37), I recorded my satisfaction with following the lesson exactly. In my journal of the Researcher for Lesson 1, I wrote:

This was a highly engaging and effective way to introduce *Braidy, the StoryBraid®*. The students appeared to really enjoy the toolbox with the assortment of “tools”. There was a lot of laughter as students saw *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* being removed from the toolbox.

The lesson included a song, discussion, visual tools and tactile learning. I felt it met the needs of all students. (Journal of the Researcher, January 6, 2020)

I had a similar reflection after Lesson 36:

Students practiced identifying characters. This was a great, hands-on lesson. A rich discussion emerged around what a character is. As per my ongoing assessment, it was an effective informal evaluation of students' understanding of a character. This informal evaluation made me realize that there are still some misconceptions around what a character is. (Journal of the Researcher, February 8, 2020)

In two of the five lessons (Lessons 2 and 37), I reflected on how I would modify the lesson if I were to complete it again with a different group of students. In Lesson 2, an idea for an expansion activity was provided. The expansion activity had the students draw a character. I recorded:

Students asked many questions prior to beginning their drawings. Many drawings were inaccurate representations of characters based on the attributes of characters taught this far in the mini-lesson sequence. Characters have eyes, face and head. I concluded that it was too early for this expansion activity. I would have saved the expansion activity until after Lesson 4. After Lesson 4, I think students would have a better understanding of what a character is and would have been more successful in drawing characters. (Journal of the Researcher, January 7, 2020)

In Lesson 37, the activity required the teacher to give students descriptions of an animal. Based on the description the student guessed which animal was being described. I recorded the following reflection:

I should have looked closer at the descriptions before giving them to students. Upon reading the descriptions out loud to my students, I realized that some of the descriptions were very challenging. For example, “A big, round eye with an oval in the middle” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 100). None of the students were able to accurately identify the animal being described. The answer was a frog. This description was not very clear. If this description were given to me, I do not think I would have guessed it. If I were to complete this lesson again I would have modified some of the descriptions. (Journal of the Researcher, February 8, 2020)

### ***Skipped Lessons***

A total of nine lessons were skipped in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* mini-lesson sequence (see Figure 10). Lessons 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31 were skipped in response to the needs of my students. Based on my ongoing, formative assessment, I felt that some lessons did not meet the developmental level of my students. I felt that students already had a proficient understanding of the content taught in the lessons that were skipped. In the journal of the researcher, I recorded my reason for skipping Lessons 22-25:

The statement of purpose for Lessons 22-25 was “Character Expansion Contrast Of Characters By Attributes Descriptive Vocabulary Text-To-Life Connections” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 89). I skipped Lessons 22-25 because I did not feel they met the needs of my students. Students were identifying and describing characters based on attributes in prior Clifford lessons. I found the lessons were getting a bit redundant and it was time to move on. (Journal of the Researcher, February 5, 2020)



### ***Combined Lessons***

A total of 13 lessons were combined in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence (see Figure 10). Combining lessons occurred when two lessons were completed in one session. Lessons 6-7, 11-12, 14-15, 17-18, 20-21 and 32-35 were combined.

For example, Lesson 14 and 15 were combined:

Lesson 14 as per the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual:

Choose a book and read the story for enjoyment using read-aloud techniques. We are using Clifford and the Big Storm by Norman Bridwell as an example since most children are familiar with this big, red dog as a character. Identify characters. (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 95)

Lesson 15 as per the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual:

After reading the selection, point to the character head on Brady. As an extension toward print, take a copy of the character head from the manual (page 139) and, draw the eyes on it and place it in the middle of the sheet of chart paper on an easel. Make a *Character Word Splash* of story characters with the children from memory, placing the character names around the character head. Connect each name to the character head with a line, thus creating a map. (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 95)

Lessons 14 and 15 were completed in one session. In my journal, the reasons for combining lessons included: “lessons were very similar, too short and lacked depth on their own, combining lessons allowed for a more in-depth, lengthier lesson” (Journal of the Researcher, January 29, 2020).

### *Lessons Incorporating Books*

A total of seven lessons were enhanced by incorporating picture book read alouds (see Figure 10). Lessons 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 incorporated picture book read alouds. The authors encouraged the practitioner to supplement lessons. Moreau and Zagula (2008) stated at the beginning of the mini-lesson sequence, “it is important to know that you, as the practitioner, should be flexible with this sequence. You may decide to insert your self-designed mini-lessons in various places within the seventy provided” (Moreau & Zagula 2008, p. 87). I chose to supplement the mini-lessons sequence by incorporating additional picture book read alouds.

The first picture book read aloud was introduced in Lesson 14. Prior to this lesson, there were many opportunities in which a read aloud could be utilized to enhance lessons. Throughout my journal, I noted many areas where I additionally incorporated a picture book read aloud. Upon reviewing my journal of the researcher, mini-lessons, statement of purpose for Lessons 1-12 (see Figure 11). I identified specific lessons and ways in which I additionally incorporated picture book read alouds.

### **Figure 11**

*Statement of Purpose - Lessons 1-12 (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p.88)*

#### **Statement of Purpose—Lessons 1–12:**

- Introduce Braidy, the StoryBraid™ as a learning tool.
- Develop an awareness of **Character** to include people and animals.
- Introduce description words to build **simple noun phrases**.
- Connect the concept of Character to Braidy, the StoryBraid™.
- Introduce 6 universal emotion words in a general manner and relate them to Braidy (emotions are considered **mental states**).
- Build an awareness of he/she related to the nouns they represent.

In Lesson 2, I additionally incorporated the read aloud *Splat, the Cat* to model identifying characters. During this read aloud a spontaneous discussion emerged defining the main character:

*Student M: Splat is the main character.*

*Student A: What is a main character?*

*Student M: Someone who is on every page.*

*Student B: Someone who the story is mostly about.*

*Student A: Oh, yea, like someone whose picture is lots in the book.*

(Lesson Notes, January 9, 2020)

I reflected on this read aloud:

I was astonished that Student M was able to come up with Splat being the “main” character on his/her own. It was fascinating to see students independently creating definitions of the main character through their prior knowledge. Students' development of characters had been expanded. Through this conversation, I concluded that the incorporation of picture book read alouds into mini-lessons is essential. As I continue with the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence, I will continue to incorporate picture book read alouds when appropriate. (Journal of the Researcher, January 9, 2020)

Lesson 4, as per the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual, required the teacher to “ask the children to think of characters in their lives or in books they have read. Generate a list and reread the list. Tell the children that this is a list of characters and that characters are in everyday life, on television, and in books” (Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 93). My reflection on this lesson:

This activity was a stretch for students. It took a significant amount of prompting for students to recall a list of familiar characters. At this point, students did not have enough knowledge to generate a list independently. A major flaw with this activity is that it assumes students know enough about characters to identify characters in their everyday lives, on television and in books. It also assumes students have been exposed previously to many characters and that they are able to readily identify characters. Reading books and identifying characters in books could provide students with the prior knowledge needed to generate a list of characters. The teacher could then further activate the student's prior

knowledge by bringing in read alouds that were previously read to generate a list. (Journal of the Researcher, January 13, 2020)

Lessons 9 and 10 introduced recognizing the characters' feelings. The mini-lesson suggested introducing the six universal emotions (happy, mad, sad, scared, disgusted and surprised). Then display the universal emotions on Braidy®, ask students to identify emotions and give examples as to why someone may feel that emotion (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). Upon completing these lessons, I noted in my reflection that I thought it would be “important for students to apply their new knowledge and identify characters’ emotions in stories” (Journal of the Researcher, January 9, 2020). Additionally, I added two picture books where students practiced identifying the characters’ emotions using the six universal emotions. During these picture book read alouds we changed Braidy’s® expression to reflect on how the character was feeling throughout the story. In Lessons 11-12, a similar reflection was noted, “No book was included in this lesson. In order to promote recall and gain a sense of story structure, I feel that it is important to begin to include more high-interest, picture book read alouds” (Journal of the Researcher, January 22, 2020).

Lesson 13 required the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® beads to be used to retell physical actions. After completing this lesson, I expanded on it by using the beads to recall the characters' actions during the read aloud, *Mean, Jean the Recess Queen*. A general comment was made after this lesson, “Overall, this far, I have found the lessons do not include enough exposure to picture book read alouds. I feel that the content taught in lessons should also be applied to and explicitly taught in picture book read alouds” (Journal of the Researcher, January 28, 2020).

**Category Three: *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® Lesson Layout**

In 3 out of 37 lessons, I recorded concerns around the organization and structure of lessons. Lessons where concerns were recorded were Lessons 1, 3 and 36. In Lesson 1, I expressed some confusion around the layout of the lesson in my reflection:

The organization of the lesson was not clear. It took some time to figure out where the lesson was. The lesson suggests using a “toolbox” with an assortment of “tools” which is not listed under the “materials needed” section in the scope and sequence of mini-lessons. Lessons could be laid out more clearly and precisely by ensuring all materials are listed in the scope and sequence of mini-lessons. (Journal of the Researcher, January 6, 2020)

In Lesson 3, I expressed a similar concern: “I found the lesson layout a bit challenging to find; however, when I did figure it out it was very manageable and was directly related to the lesson intent” (Journal of the Researcher, January 9, 2020).

In Lesson 36, I expressed concern around the materials needed to complete the lesson: This lesson required access to the song or book, *Over in the Meadow Where the Green Grass Grows*. There were two main issues with this lesson. First, the book/song was not listed under the "materials needed" section. I did not realize this material was needed until reading the specifics of the lesson. I had reviewed the materials before beginning the program and purchased the books required. Unfortunately, because this book was not on the materials list I did not purchase it and was not able to find a hard copy in time for the lesson. Second, there are multiple versions of this song/book and the specific version/author was not specified in the "mini-lesson" or the "scope and sequence" in the , *the StoryBraid*® manual. I found multiple versions of *Over in the Meadow Where the Green Grass Grows* online and I chose one that I thought would be engaging for my

students. However, when I began the lesson, I quickly noticed the version I had chosen had different animals than were addressed in the lesson. This caused confusion; I stopped the lesson and moved on. Over my lunch break, I found the correct version online and we tried the lesson again. Listing the author and book in the "materials needed" section could have eliminated this disruption. (Journal of the Researcher, February 8, 2020)

#### **Category Four: Student Responses Toward *Braidy, The StoryBraid*®**

Students appeared to respond positively to *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lessons. Lessons where positive responses were recorded were 1, 4, 5, 7-10, and 25. Students' laughter, willingness to participate in activities and the excitement in their voices when speaking about Braidy® gave me the impression that students were enjoying the program.

Lesson 1 introduced *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® as a learning tool. This lesson suggested bringing in a toolbox with *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® and an assortment of tools inside. I pulled out the tools one at a time and we discussed the job the tool would be used for. A few items in the toolbox included a paintbrush (a tool for painting), a pencil (a tool for drawing or writing), a hammer (a tool for nailing together wood), etc. The last tool we pulled out was *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®. As I pulled out *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®, I introduced Braidy® and asked the students, "How do you think we could use Brady as a tool?" Student B replied, "To help our brains think?" (Lesson Notes, January 6, 2020). Following, this lesson I recorded:

Students' attentiveness during this lesson proved it was a highly engaging and effective way to introduce *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®. The students appeared to enjoy the toolbox with the assortment of "tools". The toolbox was a great hook and there was a lot of laughter as students saw *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® being removed from the toolbox. (Journal of the Researcher, January 6, 2020)

Throughout the lessons, it continued to appear students were expressing enthusiasm towards the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program. I recorded student responses following Lesson 5 in my journal:

Students were very excited to draw their characters. Once finished students were asking to take a copy of the template home to draw more characters. This lesson was a big hit! The next morning three students brought in the characters they had created at home and eagerly shared them at morning circle time. (Journal of the Researcher, January 14, 2020)

It appeared the enthusiasm demonstrated by students in early lessons was maintained throughout the program. In Lesson 25, Student L saw me setting up Braidy® and asked, “Are we doing the characters?” I replied, “Yes”. Student L said, “Oh good, 'cause that is so fun” (Lesson Notes, February 5, 2020).

Braidy® became a visual signal that a *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lesson would occur shortly. When students saw Braidy® come out they appeared eager to engage in lessons. I recorded six occurrences in my lesson notes (Lessons 4, 5, 7-10) where students began spontaneously singing at the beginning of the lesson:

Braidy is a character,

Braidy is a character,

Eyes, face, and head,

Eyes face and head

(Moreau & Zagula, 2008, p. 33)

### **Chapter Summary**

In chapter four, I outlined the coding process used to analyze all data sources. I presented lessons according to their narrative developmental sequence. In Lessons 1-37 of the *Braidy, the*

*StoryBraid*® mini-lessons sequence, the greatest number of lessons addressed Stage One: Labels and Descriptions with fewer lessons addressing subsequent stages in the narrative developmental sequence. Throughout the delivery of the program, lessons were modified to support my students by incorporating books, combining or skipping lessons and five lessons were delivered exactly as per the manual. During the delivery of the program, some concerns emerged regarding the layout of the lessons. Students appeared to respond positively throughout the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program expressing enthusiasm and eagerness to participate in lessons. In the next chapter, I will present the themes that have emerged from the analysis of the study findings outlined in chapter four. In chapter five, I will also discuss implications on my teaching practice, look at recommendations for improvements to the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual, address limitations of the study and provide recommendations for further research. I will conclude with discussing *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® as a tier-one support.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter will review my findings in regards to my inquiry question: *How effective is the Braidy, the StoryBraid® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories?* First, it will discuss the emerging themes from the findings in relation to the literature. Themes include: engagement, role of oral narratives in early literacy, story grammar and read alouds, steady improvement in story grammar elements, story grammar as a multi-tier support and the importance of training teachers in story grammar. Next, it will assert the implications *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* will have on my teaching and practice. After, it will look at possible recommendations for improving the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* manual. Subsequently, the chapter discusses limitations of the case study and possible areas for future research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* as a tier-one support.

#### Engagement

Students demonstrated consistent engagement throughout the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* mini-lesson sequence. There were two main reasons students maintained high levels of engagement throughout the eight-week study. The first reason was the tactile and interactive nature of *Braidy, the StoryBraid®*. Throughout mini-lessons, students were active participants during read alouds, taking turns to add icons to Braidy®, use the accessories to change Braidy's® emotions and hold Braidy® during read alouds. The second reason was the format of lessons: read alouds paired with interactive mini-lessons and explicit story grammar instruction. Throughout the study, students were introduced to many new oral narrative skills and were prompted to apply their new skills during activities involving read alouds. Examples of activities

included tiptoeing up to the pocket chart to add a picture of their character when it arose in a read aloud and changing Braidy's® emotion to match the emotion of the characters in the read aloud.

Over the course of the study, students were eager to take additional character templates home to create more characters and at one point a student referred to the program as "so fun". Students' laughter throughout lessons and willingness to participate in lessons were also indicators they were enjoying the program. These findings are consistent with Brown et al.'s (2014) research. Brown et al. (2014) conducted a story grammar intervention with students in small groups. The researchers claimed students eagerly volunteered to be the first group to participate in the story grammar intervention and expressed disappointment when the intervention concluded. The classroom teacher and principal also observed students' overall participation and engagement increased during read alouds during the intervention (Brown et al., 2014).

My students have always demonstrated enjoyment for picture book read alouds. However, upon the incorporation of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® students' engagement and enthusiasm toward picture book read alouds increased greatly. Students were eager to identify elements of story grammar and engage in discussions during picture book read alouds. These results corroborate Whalon et al.'s (2019) findings. In Whalon et al.'s (2019) study, the classroom teacher recorded that students who participated in the story grammar intervention were "more interested", "more engaged", "more enthusiastic" and "paid a lot more attention" to books during the story grammar intervention (p. 10).

### **Role of Oral Narratives in Early Literacy**

Narratives are an effective format in developing oral language skills because the skills used in oral narratives are of greater complexity than the skills required in daily language (Stadler & Ward, 2005). Stadler and Ward (2005) stated that "narratives provide opportunities for children to

develop this higher-level of language before they become readers” (p.73). Stadler and Ward's (2005) research reinforces the findings in this study, as many of the participants were prereaders. Students demonstrated an increased level of language and awareness of story grammar as they discussed stories. The *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program explicitly taught narrative skills at a developmentally appropriate level. The in-depth nature of the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lessons led to conversations around story grammar that I had not seen before in my kindergarten, grade 1 and 2 classroom. As students grappled with their understanding of story grammar, the term ‘characters’ was frequently brought into their conversations. These findings demonstrate that complex language was emerging throughout the course of the study.

Pinto et al.'s (2019) study asserted the importance of developing students’ oral narrative competence in kindergarten. Although I agree with Pinto et al.'s (2019) findings of kindergarten being a crucial transition phase in children’s narrative development, the results from this multi-grade study shed light on the importance of continuing to build oral narrative competence in grades beyond kindergarten. According to the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual, the final stage on the narrative developmental sequence, *Stage Five: Development of the Plot*, is typically not achieved until seven to eight years old (Moreau & Zagula, 2008). This asserts the importance that although children in kindergarten have the potential to improve their oral narrative skills, these skills need to be continually built upon in later primary years. The main reason for this is because some of the oral narrative skills may not be developmentally achievable in Kindergarten and will, therefore, need to be taught in grades one, two or three.

### **Story Grammar and Read Alouds**

Throughout the 37 mini-lessons, two picture book read alouds were included in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence. Both picture book read alouds were utilized over a series

of several lessons and supported students understanding of story grammar and oral narrative skills. Picture book read alouds enhanced the story grammar lessons and should be utilized as a primary tool in story grammar lessons. These results validate Miller et al.'s (2018) findings. Miller et al. (2018) study indicated that a story grammar combined with repeated read alouds is an effective intervention for improving EL oral narrative skills.

### **Steady Improvement in Identifying Story Grammar Elements**

Whalon et al. (2019) utilized an adapted story grammar intervention with students with ASD. Students demonstrated a steady improvement with the most significant gains in the final phase of the study (Whalon et al., 2019). Whalon et al.'s (2019) results corroborate this study's; students demonstrated a gradual increase over the course of the eight weeks of the study. In the final weeks of the study, students demonstrated an increased ability to identify story grammar elements including characters, setting, feelings and actions.

### **Story Grammar as a Multi-Tier Support**

Story grammars have been proven to support exceptional learners in all RTI tiers of support. Alves et al.'s (2015) results concluded that a story grammar intervention had the ability to improve reading comprehension for students with disabilities and struggling readers in a tier-two, small group setting. Whalon et al.'s (2019) study concluded that story grammar interventions prove to be effective in improving listening comprehension among children with ASD in a tier-three, one-on-one setting. The results of this study support story grammar instruction as a whole class, tier-one intervention with EL. In conjunction with the results of Alves et al.'s (2015) and Whalon et al.'s (2019) studies and the results of this present study, story grammar interventions demonstrate promising results as a multi-tiered level of support, effective in supporting oral narrative development in a variety of learners.

### **Importance of Training Teachers in Story Grammar**

Alves et al. (2015) suggested training teachers in story grammar interventions, in order for the intervention to be effectively incorporated into students' regular reading instruction. As a teacher who had no formal training in story grammar, I fully support this notion. Before beginning this program, I had a very minimal understanding of story grammar instruction. Throughout the study, I expressed difficulties with navigating the *Braidy the StoryBraid*® manual. Formal training regarding the *Braidy the StoryBraid*® program may have reduced these frustrations.

In 1985, a study revealed that kindergarten teachers held minimal value on the educational importance of oral narratives (Morrow, 1985). With current research around the importance of oral narratives, I am intrigued to hear current preschool, kindergarten and primary teachers' perspectives on oral narratives and their experience with the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program. As discussed earlier, *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program is not commonly utilized in my current school district. However, I wonder about the prevalence of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® in school districts across the province? Do other teachers find *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® an effective program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories? Do current teachers understand the importance of developing oral narrative skills?

In my six years of teaching and a diploma in early year's education, I have never come across a professional development opportunity or course encompassing story grammar interventions. Formal training in story grammar would also inform teachers of the importance of oral narrative skills and their impact on reading abilities, as well as expose more teachers to the story grammar intervention and encourage them to incorporate the program into their instructional practices.

### **Implications of Study Findings on my Practice**

Prior to this research, I was not aware of the key role oral narratives and story retells play in students' overall reading abilities. I am certain many of my colleagues will feel similar. I look forward to sharing my findings and *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® with my colleagues in the school district I currently work in. I will continue to use the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program with my students and follow the lesson sequence in the manual while adapting lessons as necessary to meet the needs of my students. I will also continue to look for more ways *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® can be incorporated into picture book read alouds and enhance my current oral language routines.

### **Recommendations for Improving the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® Program**

Lesson plans were a good support even though substantial modifications were made during the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence to meet the needs of my students. The *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® manual is designed for early childhood teachers. Early childhood encompasses birth to eight years old. Considering this wide developmental span, breaking down the manual into sections that pertain specifically to each developmental stage would support teachers. Throughout the instruction of the program, I combined lessons when needed. I also skipped lessons that I felt did not meet the needs of my students. Although all programs require tailoring to meet each group of students' needs, a set of lessons that pertain particularly to a specific grade or two grades would provide teachers with a more developmentally appropriate sequence of lessons.

A more teacher-friendly manual could be created. I found the layout of the manual somewhat difficult to navigate, especially early on in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program. This would discourage many teachers from carrying out the program. Throughout lessons, I found myself flipping through different sections of the manual to find all the information I needed for a single lesson. Expanding on the lessons to incorporate all information and materials needed to

teach a lesson into one to two pages in the same section would make for a more user-friendly manual.

Another area where the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program could be further developed is the incorporation of more read alouds throughout the sequence of mini-lessons. Throughout my journal I noted many areas where a picture book read aloud could be incorporated into lessons. Many of the concepts taught in lessons could be further solidified by the addition of picture book read alouds. For example, when characters' emotions are introduced in lessons nine and ten, a book suggestion that models character emotions would be helpful.

### **Limitations and Areas of Future Research**

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was the research was conducted with a small sample size of 13 participants in a single classroom with one teacher. This limits the generalizability of the study, expanding the sample size to include multiple classrooms and teachers would solidify the findings. A second limitation was the research was conducted with multi-grade, kindergarten, grade one and two students. Therefore, the findings pertain to this specific multi-grade setting. Further research could be conducted in a single grade classroom to compare findings with a multi-grade setting. A third limitation was due to time constraints; the study took place over 37 lessons in an eight-week period. As the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence is comprised of 70 lessons, this study only covered a portion of the lessons. Future research could expand on the study completing all the lessons in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® mini-lesson sequence.

Another limitation of the study was no formal pre or post-assessments were conducted. An assessment of students' oral narrative skills before beginning the program would provide baseline assessment data. A post-assessment would confirm the improvements that the *Braidy, the*

*StoryBraid*® program has on students' oral narrative skills. Finally, including a follow-up assessment in subsequent weeks or months, would determine whether students are able to maintain skills taught in the program.

Longitudinal studies indicate that oral narrative skills highly correspond with students' later reading fluency, after two to three years of formal reading instruction. Short-term research indicates a weaker correlation between students' oral narrative and reading abilities at the beginning of reading instruction (Reese et al., 2009). As this study took place over the course of eight weeks it is hard to say whether the lessons taught in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® study will impact later reading abilities. A longitudinal study, spanning over multiple years with a controlled group participating in *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® instruction and a second group without *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® instruction would further validate the programs' impact on later reading abilities.

A final limitation is the research was conducted with students who are primarily ELLs. Unless students go through an outside agency, they are not assessed for learning disabilities until grade three or later. Although some students in the study may have had learning difficulties, no students were officially diagnosed. Further research could be conducted on other specific populations of students in a tier-one setting.

### **Conclusion – *Braidy the StoryBraid*® as a Tier-One Support**

The inquiry question guiding this research was: *How effective is the Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories? Through a case study approach, data collection tools included a journal of the researcher, lesson notes and students drawing/writing samples. Class discussions, natural conversations, and drawing/writing templates served as evidence of students' learning. Based on the analysis of the findings, several themes emerged that demonstrate *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® is



an effective tier-one program in supporting students' oral narrative skills. Current and prior research indicates that explicitly teaching primary students higher-level language through story grammar instruction will support later reading development (Stadler & Ward, 2005). Furthermore, story grammar programs that utilize repeated readings of picture books appear to be a promising format in developing students' oral narrative skills. In conjunction with the results of Alves et al.'s (2015) and Whalon et al.'s (2019) studies and the results of this present study, story grammar interventions show promising results to be a multi-tiered level of support, effective in supporting oral narrative development in a variety of learners. Students' high level of engagement throughout the program showed that the varied activities in the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® lessons were effective in keeping students enthusiastic. The visual and tactile nature of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® served as cues and prompted students in retelling and remembering story elements. Teachers are continually searching for tools to promote an increasingly inclusive setting, *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® is one tool that can effectively support inclusion in oral language development. Providing teacher training in story grammar instruction is a key factor in ensuring *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® is utilized effectively in classrooms. In this research, based on the findings, I find the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® to be an effective program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories. Furthermore, I believe *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® could be adapted to support students as a tier-one intervention in any primary setting regardless of background and abilities of students.

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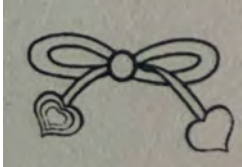
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## Appendix A

*Braidy, the StoryBraid®* breakdown of icons and descriptions

Icon	Component	Description
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Main Character</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who?</li> </ul>	<p>Who is the character? The head and face represent the character or who the story is about.</p> <p>The <i>Braidy, The StoryBraid®</i> kit includes four characters: a girl, boy, dog, and rabbit (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where/When?</li> </ul>	<p>Where and when does the story take place? The star represents the time and place of the story (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Initiating Event (Kick-Off)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What?</li> </ul>	<p>What event begins the action in the story? The shoe represents the problem or an exciting event (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Internal Response (Feeling)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How?</li> </ul>	<p>How does the main character feel about the initiating event? The heart represents the main characters feeling to the initiating event (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>

 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What?</li> </ul>	<p>What is the main character's response to the initiating event? What is his/her plan? The hand represents the characters plan (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)?</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Attempts/Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How?</li> </ul>	<p>How does the main character respond to the kick-off? The beads represent each attempt to carry out the plan, a sequence/list of actions (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Direct Consequence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What?</li> </ul>	<p>What happened to the main character as a result of action/attempts? The tied laces represent the story finishing or "tied up" (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>
 <p>(Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008)</p>	<p>Resolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How?</li> </ul>	<p>How does the character feel about the direct consequence? The laces with the hearts represent the lesson or the moral of the story (Moreau, &amp; Zagula, 2008).</p>

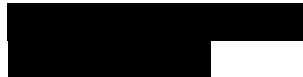


## Appendix B

## Parent Recruitment Letter

**Effectiveness of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® as a Tier-One Classroom Intervention****Principal Investigator**

Stevie Olsthoorn, Student Researcher  
Master of Special Education  
Vancouver Island University

**Student Supervisor**

Dr. Ana Vieira  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University



Dear Parents/Guardians,

As you may know, I am working on my Master of Education in Special Education through Vancouver Island University. My passion and studies have focused on understanding the connection between early language development and reading/writing skills. My inquiry question is:

**How effective is the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories?**

**Why *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®?**

The reason I chose *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® as the foundation of my project was because their goal closely aligned with my vision. *MindWing Concepts, Inc.* (2019) goal is "to give every child-regardless of age, or culture- the skills to think, communicate and learn effectively in order to achieve academic and social success". It is also a research-based program with extensive evidence. *MindWing Concepts, Inc.*, the creators of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*®, was founded in 1994 by a speech-language pathologist, Maryellen Ronney Moreau. The methodology stems from research on oral language development, narrative structure and development. The evidence proves it to be an effective tool with a wide range of learner types and abilities. More information can be found at <https://mindwingconcepts.com/>.

**What is *Braidy, The StoryBraid*®?**

Braidy® is a visual and tactile tool used to support children in retelling and developing a story. Braidy® is made up of different icons that help children remember the important parts of a story, including: Character, Setting, Initiating Event, Internal Response, Plan, Attempts, Direct Consequences and Resolution. These components are essential to retelling and ultimately writing.

**What will participant involvement look like?**

Participation will not require anything extra from students. The lessons will include all kindergarten to grade 2 students as part of regularly scheduled Language Arts instruction. The lessons will take place in the classroom during the regular school day. I will deliver 1 mini-lesson per day, 3 to 4 days per week over the course of approximately 8 weeks. Approximately, 20 to 30 minutes will be allotted per mini-lesson. Only data from those parents/students who give consent/assent will be included in the study. The researcher will only know who has given consent/assent at the end of the program. Information from non-participants will be removed from the data. Participants' information will be coded through the use of an alphanumeric code.

**What is the benefit to my child?**

There are no direct benefits to your child from participation in the study. The benefits for your child may come from instruction using the *Braidy, the StoryBraid®* program. Hopefully, the program will contribute to your child's growth and development in his/her oral language, reading and writing skills along with the confidence that comes with this progress.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the school [REDACTED] for any questions, clarifications or further information.

Sincerely,

Stevie Olsthoorn

## Appendix C

## Parent Consent/Student Assent Form

**Effectiveness of *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® as a Tier-One Classroom Intervention****Principal Investigator**

Stevie Olsthoorn, Student Researcher  
Master of Special Education  
Vancouver Island University

**Student Supervisor**

Dr. Ana Vieira  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University



Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am completing the final year of my Masters in Special Education through Vancouver Island University. A part of my studies is the completion of a final project. I would greatly appreciate your support in my growth and learning as a teacher.

**Purpose**

My goal is to assess the effectiveness of *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® in supporting children in developing and retelling a story. My hope is that my project will contribute to the research on the *Braidy, the StoryBraid*® approach as well as introduce this method to the Peace River North School District.

**Participants**

There are no distinguishing activities for participants who do or not participate in the research including assessment activities and materials that I will be using for teaching. Participation in the research would not in any way be linked to any performance of assessment in regular class activities. Participation will not require anything extra from students. Regular lessons will take place in your child's classroom during the regular school day. I will deliver 1 mini-lesson per day, 3 to 4 days per week over the course of approximately 8 weeks. Approximately, 20 to 30 minutes will be allotted per mini-lesson.

**Participants Confidentially**

While there is a slight possibility that the readers will be able to identify me, the school and class I was teaching in the research, I will take every precaution to ensure confidentiality of all information including the school and your child. The school and students' names will not appear in

the project. No names will be used in the project. Names will be replaced with Student A, Student B, Student C, etc.

### **Management of Information**

Signed consent forms and paper copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. No data will be stored on Internet databases. Data will be deleted and shredded at the end of the project, approximately May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

### **Use of Information**

Student comments, observations drawing and writing samples will be used in the Master of Special Education thesis. If you wish to be kept informed about my progress I am happy to keep you updated.

### **Participation**

Whether or not your child participates in my project they will receive the same instruction. Your consent, returned to the school in a sealed envelope, will be collected by the secretary and be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the school's office. I will not know who is participating in the study until the end of the program teaching time.

### **Withdrawal**

You may withdraw your permission for me to use in my research information and materials I collect from your child from the project at any time until the end of the program, for any reason and without explanation. In order to withdraw permission, write a withdrawal note and submit it to the secretary. The secretary will file your note in the locked filing cabinet until the data collection stage is completed. One week before the data collection stage is completed, I will send a brief reminder to remind you of your right to withdraw your child from the study.

### **Student Assent**

Please explain the research to your child and obtain verbal assent. Please ensure that your child understands that the project will not affect their regular school activities. Please do not return the consent form if your child does not wish to participate.

### **Consent**

Two copies of the consent form are provided one to keep for your records and one to return to the secretary in the sealed envelope provided.

*I have explained the project to my child. I understand the information provided above. I hereby consent to allow my child to participate in this project under the following conditions:*

<i>I consent to having my child participate in the project as indicated.</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
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<i>I would like to receive a link to the completed project.</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I, Stevie Olsthoorn, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any concerns about your child's treatment as a research participant in this project, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board by telephone at 250-740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.

## Appendix D

Letter to Principal and School District

**Effectiveness of *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® as a Tier-One Classroom Intervention****Principal Investigator**

Stevie Olsthoorn, Student Researcher  
Master of Special Education  
Vancouver Island University  
[REDACTED]

**Student Supervisor**

Dr. Ana Vieira  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

I am working on my Master of Education in Special Education through Vancouver Island University. My passion and studies have focused on understanding the connection between early language development and reading/writing skills. My inquiry question is:

**How effective is the *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® program in supporting students' oral language skills to recount personal narratives and stories?**

**What is the purpose of my research?**

My goal is to learn more about the *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® approach as it pertains to a whole class setting and as a tier-one intervention. If this study is successful and the program proves to be a worthwhile intervention, then I would like to share my knowledge amongst my colleagues within the School District.

**Why *Braidy, The StoryBraid*®?**

The reason I chose *Braidy, The StoryBraid*® as the foundation of my project was because their goal closely aligned with my vision. *MindWing Concepts, Inc.* (2019) goal is "to give every child-regardless of age, or culture- the skills to think, communicate and learn effectively in order to achieve academic and social success". It is also a research-based program with extensive evidence. *MindWing Concepts, Inc.*, the creators of *Braidy, The StoryBraid*®, was founded in 1994 by a speech-language pathologist, Maryellen Ronney Moreau. The methodology stems from research on oral language development, narrative structure and development. The evidence proves

it to be an effective tool with a wide range of learner types and abilities. More information can be found at <https://mindwingconcepts.com/>.

**What is *Braidy, The StoryBraid*®?**

Braidy® is a visual and tactile tool used to support children in retelling and developing a story. Braidy® is made up of different icons that help children remember the important parts of a story, including: Character, Setting, Initiating Event, Internal Response, Plan, Attempts, Direct Consequences and Resolution. These components are essential to retelling and ultimately writing.

**What will participant involvement look like?**

Participation will not require anything extra. The lessons will include all kindergarten to grade 2 students as part of regularly scheduled Language Arts instruction. The lessons will take place in the classroom during the regular school day. I will deliver 1 mini-lesson per day, 3 to 4 days per week over the course of approximately 8 weeks. Approximately, 20 to 30 minutes will be allotted per mini-lesson. Only data from those parents/students who give consent/assent will be included in the study. The researcher will only know who has given consent/assent at the end of the program. Information from non-participants will be removed from the data. Participants' information will be coded through the use of an alphanumeric code.

**Research ethics**

I received approval from the Research Ethics Board of Vancouver Island University in November 2019. I am now seeking approval from you, as the principal of [REDACTED], to implement my master's project starting January 2020 and finishing May 2020.

I am happy to meet with you and any other members of the school district involved in making a decision to answer any questions or provide clarification regarding the project. I look forward to hearing back from you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Stevie Olsthoorn

## Appendix E

## Journal of the Researcher

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lesson Number</b>
<b>Lesson Intent</b>	<b>Lesson Length</b>

- 1. Was the lesson clear, manageable and related to the lesson intent?**
- 2. Did the lesson build upon prior knowledge from previous lessons?**
- 3. Was the lesson content appropriate for the students' needs? Did it allow for differentiation to meet the needs of all students'?**
- 4. How did students demonstrate their learning in this lesson? Was this an effective method?**
- 5. What were the overall strengths of the lesson?**
- 6. What were the overall weaknesses of the lesson?**



Appendix F  
Lesson Notes

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lesson Number</b>
<b>Lesson Start Time</b>	<b>Lesson Finish Time</b>

**Student comments**

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Comment</b>

**Is the lesson motivating and engaging?**

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**General Observations/Comments**

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