



Ludic Language Pedagogy Special Issue Article: The Ludic You Love

(2026)

<https://www.llpjournal.org/>

Story-asking: Imaginative, Co-created Stories

Diane Neubauer ^{a*}, Reed Riggs^b

^a University of Louisville (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8612-0104>)

^b Le Jardin Academy, Honolulu (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5438-2903>)

Item Details

Keywords:

TPRS
Story-asking
Instructional activities
Storytelling

Key points

- **Name of ludic object:** Story-asking
- **Type/genre/theme:** Story-based, imaginative
- **Intended audience age** 🧑: Any
- **Intended audience proficiency** 💬: Often recommended for CEFR A1 and higher (novice to intermediate learners); potential for advanced learners
- **Typical time to play** ⏳: 15 minutes up to hours
- **Number of players** 👥: N/A Whole class activity led by instructor

Microblog synopsis

Story-asking: The language instructor guides the whole class interactively through the creation of a protagonist(s) and a story, leading to imaginative and potentially playful details and plots. #story-asking #stories

View at the LLP Site: <https://www.llpjournal.org/2026/07/01/llp-special-edition-the-ludic-you-love.html>

* Corresponding author. Email address: email address (preferred title and name)



1. Introduction

As language instructors, we often search for instructional practices that simultaneously help students gain language proficiency while maintaining their interest and enjoyment. Playful pedagogies such as story-asking can be a way to meet these goals. Story-asking, as distinguished from storytelling, is a term that refers to comprehensible input-based stories which are interactively and imaginatively co-constructed by the teacher and students. Story-asking has been a key aspect of some versions of Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) (Lichtman, 2018; Ray & Seely, 2004, 2019; Ta & Riggs, 2019). Unlike tabletop role-playing games, in story-asking, students do not individually take roles, nor seek to win a campaign, but instead collaboratively decide, under the teacher's moderation and guidance, the main character, details, and plot points in a story developed together by the class members and teacher. Story-asking is therefore a type of imaginative, playful use of language without a game format. Story-asking allows the teacher and students to use the target language in the context of a story created during part of one lesson, or across multiple lessons in the case of more complex stories.

2. Procedures

2.1 How to conduct story-asking

In story-asking, the instructor guides the whole class and moderates the story content (Lichtman, 2018). The instructor uses the target language to ask questions, sometimes first to determine who the protagonist of the story is, then about the protagonist's need or problem, their attempts to solve that issue, and finally to a conclusion. The instructor uses students' responses to co-construct the story, choosing from among student ideas or inviting students to vote on some details. Story-asking can involve a variety of question types, allowing for comprehension checking as well as imaginative ideas to emerge. Instructors may plan stories around a script or outline which has been designed to introduce key vocabulary and grammar points in context, or may use more open-ended story possibilities, depending on their goals or level of experience with story-asking. Story-asking requires enough comprehension of vocabulary within questions and discourse-level comprehension by learners so that they can offer ideas for story details while tracking the meaning of the growing narrative. Teachers may incorporate additional student roles such as acting as characters in the story, finding props or scenery, or drawing an artist's rendition of the characters (Lichtman, 2018). Story-asking developed primarily as an instructional activity with novice learners, but can be conducted in more complex language with more advanced learners (Lichtman, 2018).

Story-asking is a flexible strategy with a lot of possible modifications. As a hypothetical example of story-asking, a teacher might plan for 20-30 minutes of class time for story asking, and prepare a few key words, especially verbs, in whatever tense or conjugation makes the communication clear ("is hungry", "wants to eat"). Many story-asking plot lines include a person with a problem ("Class, we're going to make a story together. Who is hungry?" "Our class member, Jessica!" Jessica nods and smiles. "Ok, Jessica is hungry."), some details developed with the students about what that person will try to do about it ("What does Jessica want to eat?" "A hamburger?" "Pizza?" or more surreal options) and two or three attempts to solve the problem ("Jessica goes to WalMart. Is there pizza at WalMart? No! They're out of pizza at WalMart! Jessica goes to..."). The teacher asks and students contribute ideas for who the person is, where they might go, and whether or not the person is, ultimately, successful. Sometimes the most entertaining and engaging story ends with the person failing in each attempt ("Jessica doesn't get any pizza, so she eats some asparagus instead. YUM! Jessica isn't hungry anymore!") The teacher could ensure that time for the class to finish their story before the end of that lesson, or could continue the story in a subsequent lesson if students' interest and the teacher's goals allowed for that.

The authors of this article, who are both Mandarin Chinese language instructors and teacher educators, have often used story-asking in their own language instruction. As one example, Neubauer (2017) used story-asking in her novice-level, high school Chinese language class based on recently-introduced vocabulary items related to being able to speak languages. She led students to co-create a story imagining a person who got a job as a shopping mall security officer because they needed to know a specific language. A [video recording of that story-asking](#) (2017) can be seen on YouTube.

TEACHING TIP

Instructors may plan stories around a script or outline designed to introduce key vocabulary and grammar points in context, or use more open-ended story possibilities.

2.2 Story-asking and other instructional practices

Story-asking can fit into a broader set of instructional practices. Instructors may incorporate speaking activities such as student retells within or after story creation. Reading activities often follow story-asking, perhaps using a written version of the co-created story or a similar, prepared story or graded reader (Lichtman, 2018). Instructors may also lead from the story to writing tasks, such as co-created texts as in The Language Experience Approach (Taylor, 2000), drawing a comic strip, rewriting the story with some changes or a new ending, or creative fluency writing.

For an author's example, Neubauer usually leads into reading as the next instructional activity by involving the students in retelling points of the story as she types those details into a text that they read aloud chorally. That reading, when completed, then becomes a text that students can re-read and respond to by illustrating, summarizing, writing an alternative ending, or otherwise interacting with their co-created story.

3. Research

3.1 Research on motivation and learning outcomes

Research related to story-asking has found both motivational aspects as well as correlation to language proficiency results. Research by Printer (2019, 2023) has found that TPRS that includes story-asking meets the conditions for motivation in Self-Determination Theory through its opportunities for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Lichtman (2019) reviewed 76 studies related to TPRS, many of which included story-asking. Lichtman (2019) concluded that such instructional practices have led to gains in language proficiency, generally matching results of other approaches or exceeding those results in language skills such as listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing.

Research by Printer (2019, 2023) has found that [...] story-asking meets the conditions for motivation in Self-Determination Theory

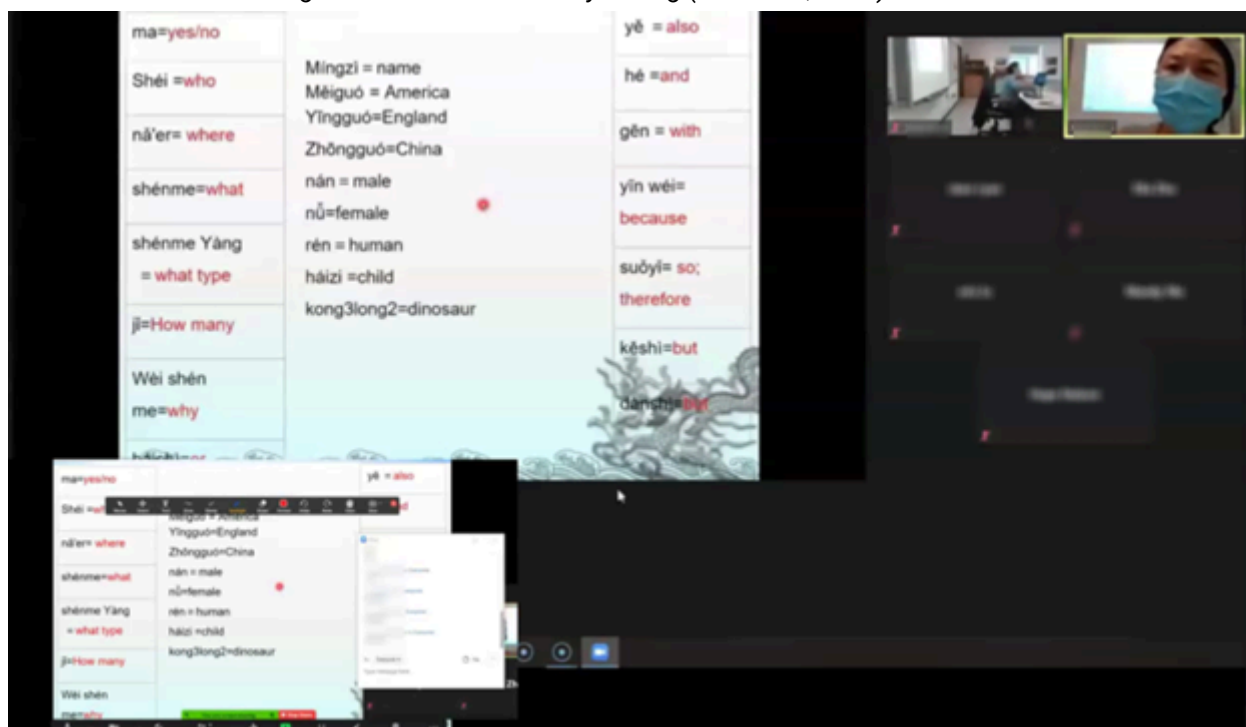
3.2 Case study example

The following is an example of how story-asking functioned in one classroom in a research study related to target language topic development (Neubauer, 2022). In one of the focal classrooms, the teacher carried out story-asking through hybrid instruction: the teacher and most students were in the classroom, and 5 to 6 of her students joined the lesson through Zoom video conferencing. The teacher used slides (see Fig. 1) showing vocabulary options to guide her questions and students' decision-making. She led them from choosing a human or an animal, then

naming and describing the dinosaur they insisted was their protagonist, subsequently deciding what snacks she ate while going to see a movie, and concluding in her getting sick and vomiting purple potato chips.

Figure 1

Screenview from *Teacher Using a Slide to Assist in Story-asking* (Neubauer, 2022)



There was evidence of student engagement and comprehension of the target language throughout story-asking in a way that seemed qualitatively different from other activities. During other activities in class, the teacher treated students as lacking adequate participation, often coaching them to respond. However, during story-asking, the opposite problem occurred: voices were louder, students argued about decisions for the story, and the teacher gave fewer prompts to students to respond, asking them questions to determine the next step of the story instead of asking them to show any response, as often happened during other instructional activities.

3.3 Critiques of story-asking

Story-asking as part of TPRS has not been without critique, and sometimes for the same reasons that story-asking can be motivating – the role of students’ and teachers’ imaginations can demonstrate a lack of cultural awareness or display biases of the story creators. Since story-asking relies on students’ ideas, narratives may lack meaningful cultural content or the voices of people in target language communities (Conlon, 2024). Student-contributed ideas may also reify tropes and stereotypes, and some instructors may rely on sexist or heteronormative characterizations and plots, or only play temporarily with possibilities beyond stereotypical norms (Cahnmann-Taylor, et al., 2020). Teachers using story-asking need to be aware of such tendencies. One method to avoid such issues is to use story-asking as one instructional activity among others that do center language communities, intercultural learning, and the voices of marginalized people. By including multiple voices and sources of language use, such as reading stories by people from target language communities and viewing videos from those communities, teachers can help students hear and begin to understand target language communities and their perspectives.

4. Teacher Education

4.1 Teacher Education

Story-asking requires teachers to manage the classroom effectively, and also to demonstrate flexible, spontaneous speaking skills in the target language. Teachers may therefore find the language proficiency required to conduct story-asking challenging (Kindt, 2021). To learn such complex procedures, some teachers have reported that it has been useful to observe experienced teachers working with students and debriefing those lessons, to participate as a language student in demonstration lessons, and to be coached on techniques (Neubauer & Wesely, 2023). The playful aspects of story-asking can also be an innovation in language teaching that may feel uncomfortable to some instructors used to a more serious tone in their classrooms. Such instructors can still develop openness to ludic pedagogies after observing classrooms where playful and imaginative talk is part of lessons (Neubauer & Riggs, 2024).

TEACHING TIP

To learn to do story-asking, instructors benefit from observing and debriefing lessons that include story-asking.

4.2 Conclusion

Story-asking has become a key strategy in input-based practices for language instruction, especially when an instructor wants to center students' imaginations, experiences, opinions, and ideas. As language teachers continue to juggle the need to engage students in instruction that is both enjoyable and promotes proficiency development, story-asking will continue to appeal.

References

- Coda, J., Cahnmann-Taylor, M., & Jiang, L. (2020). "It takes time for language to change": Challenging classroom heteronormativity through Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1-13.
- Conlon, D. (2024). *Meeting the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages through comprehensible input readers in level 1 Spanish: A comparative analysis of teachers' perceptions*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Connecticut.
- Diane Neubauer 杜雁子 Chinese learning & teaching. (2017, January 31). *Novice Chinese class: Story-Asking*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/MYeTK6FEEMg>
- Kindt, M. D. (2021). *The relationship among world language teachers' target language proficiency, self-efficacy and use of TPRS/CI in the classroom*. (Doctoral dissertation, Immaculata University). <https://library.immaculata.edu/Dissertation/digitalB/Doc916KindtM2021.pdf>
- Lichtman, K. (2019). Research on TPR Storytelling (TPRS). In *Fluency through TPR Storytelling*, 299-323.

- Lichtman, K. (2018). *Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS): An input-based approach to second language instruction*. Routledge.
- Neubauer, D. (2022). *Chinese language instruction with novice learners: Target language topic development, engagement, and comprehension in online and hybrid classrooms*. (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Iowa).
- Neubauer, D., & Wesely, P. (2023). K-12 world language teachers' use of conferences as professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 124, 104042. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104042>
- Printer, L. (2019). Student perceptions on the motivational pull of Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS): a self-determination theory perspective. *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(3), 288–301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1566397>
- Printer, L. (2023). Positive emotions and intrinsic motivation: A self-determination theory perspective on using co-created stories in the language acquisition classroom. *Language Teaching Research*. DOI: 10.1177/13621688231204443
- Ta, N., & Riggs, R. (2019). HALT Summer Summit 2019 intermediate track. (Conference presentation).
- Taylor, M. (2000, June). *The Language Experience Approach and Adult Learners*. CAELA. https://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LEA.html