

BEYOND READING

Promoting a Culture of Reading through Storytelling, Creative Expression, Parent Participation and Experiential Literacy Practices

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Abstract: Reading Mahotsav 2026–27 was implemented as a school-wide literacy initiative intended to extend reading beyond textbook-based tasks into storytelling, read-alouds, discussion, creative response, puppet-based narration, student presentations, creative writing and shared literacy experiences. Approximately 1,500 students participated in the programme. The practitioner reports that improvement in reading-related engagement and literacy behaviours was observed among 650+ students. Because the supplied evidence does not contain matched student-level pre- and post-intervention scores, this figure is treated as observational implementation evidence rather than as a standardized measure of learning gain. The evidence base available for this report includes six photographs supplied by the practitioner, a documented collection of 28 student stories, a collection of 15 poems, and a 14-profile collection of student author biodata. The creative-writing evidence demonstrates movement from receptive literacy experiences towards productive expression through characters, settings, dialogue, problems, solutions, moral ideas, imagery and original story worlds. The study uses a practitioner-based action research design with descriptive and qualitative analysis. No fabricated questionnaire responses, rubric scores, reading-fluency scores or comprehension percentages are included. The findings support the conclusion that Reading Mahotsav created a broad literacy environment in which reading, listening, speaking, imagination, creative writing and sharing were interconnected. A future cycle should add matched pre/post measures to quantify changes in reading outcomes.

Index Terms - reading culture; storytelling; experiential literacy; creative writing; poetry; oral language; student engagement; practitioner action research; parent participation; school literacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading development is not limited to decoding printed words. It involves making meaning, building oral language, engaging with stories, interpreting images, discussing ideas and gradually using reading experiences as a foundation for independent expression. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage describes literacy as meaning-making and emphasises oral language, stories, read-alouds, shared reading and exposure to engaging print material [2].

NIPUN Bharat similarly identifies a culture of reading as an important component of foundational language and literacy and notes that family, community and school participation can contribute to this culture. Its guidance also highlights the importance of print-rich environments and children's writing and creative responses [3].

Reading Mahotsav was conceived within this broader understanding. Instead of treating reading as a single classroom activity, the programme created opportunities for children to encounter stories through different modes and to respond through conversation, performance, creative work and writing. The present report documents that intervention and analyses the evidence that was actually retained.

II. RATIONALE AND NEED

A sustained reading culture requires repeated, meaningful encounters with books, stories and language. Children need opportunities to listen to literature, discuss it, imagine alternatives, express personal responses and see their own ideas valued. A school literacy event can provide an intensive opportunity to make reading visible and social, but its research value depends on documenting what was actually implemented and what evidence was generated.

The rationale for Reading Mahotsav was therefore not simply to increase the number of reading activities. It was to create a connected literacy experience in which reading could lead to oral interaction, imagination, performance and writing. This approach is consistent with the NCF Foundational Stage emphasis on stories, read-alouds, oral language and meaningful contexts for emergent reading and writing [2].

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

To examine how Reading Mahotsav 2026–27 contributed to a school-wide culture of reading by connecting storytelling and reading experiences with oral interaction, creative expression and student-generated writing.

IV. OBJECTIVES

- To document the scale of student participation in Reading Mahotsav.
- To examine the observable literacy behaviours associated with the programme.
- To document evidence of student creative writing generated in connection with the literacy initiative.
- To examine how storytelling and oral presentation created opportunities for listening, speaking, imagination and response.
- To document the emergence of student identities around storytelling and writing.
- To distinguish implementation evidence and observational evidence from formally measured learning outcomes.
- To provide a practical measurement framework for a future action-research cycle.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What forms of literacy engagement were documented during Reading Mahotsav?
2. What evidence indicates that reading experiences extended into student creative expression?
3. What forms of student writing were produced and what do they reveal about literacy engagement?
4. What evidence is available regarding observed improvement among participating students?
5. What additional measurement would be required to establish measurable pre/post learning gains?

VI. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The programme is represented by the following practitioner framework:

READ → LISTEN → DISCUSS → IMAGINE → CREATE → WRITE → SHARE

The framework positions reading as an entry point to a wider literacy ecology. Listening and reading provide language and ideas; discussion supports meaning-making; imagination enables children to construct possibilities; creative response makes thinking visible; writing converts response into a product; and sharing gives the child an authentic audience.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

The study uses a practitioner-based action research design with descriptive and qualitative analysis. The practitioner documents a real school intervention, analyses the evidence generated by the intervention, reflects on what can and cannot be concluded, and proposes a strengthened evidence-collection cycle.

7.2 Participants

Approximately 1,500 students participated in Reading Mahotsav-related activities. The supplied creative-writing files include students from Classes 2–5, while the programme was conceived as a wider school literacy initiative. The exact distribution of the 1,500 participants by class or section is not available in the evidence reviewed and is therefore not reconstructed.

7.3 Evidence Sources

Evidence source	What it contributes	Status
Participation information supplied by practitioner	Approx. 1,500 participants; 650+ students reported to show improvement	Practitioner-reported observational evidence
Six photographs supplied with this manuscript	Storytelling, read-aloud, student audience, recognition and puppet/story performance contexts	Direct visual implementation evidence
Story Writing 26–27 document	28 documented student story submissions	Documentary evidence
Poetry Writing 26–27 document	15 documented poems	Documentary evidence
Aspiring Authors Biodata	14 documented student author profiles	Documentary evidence
Questionnaire/rubric instruments	Framework for future measurement	Instrument only; no response dataset supplied

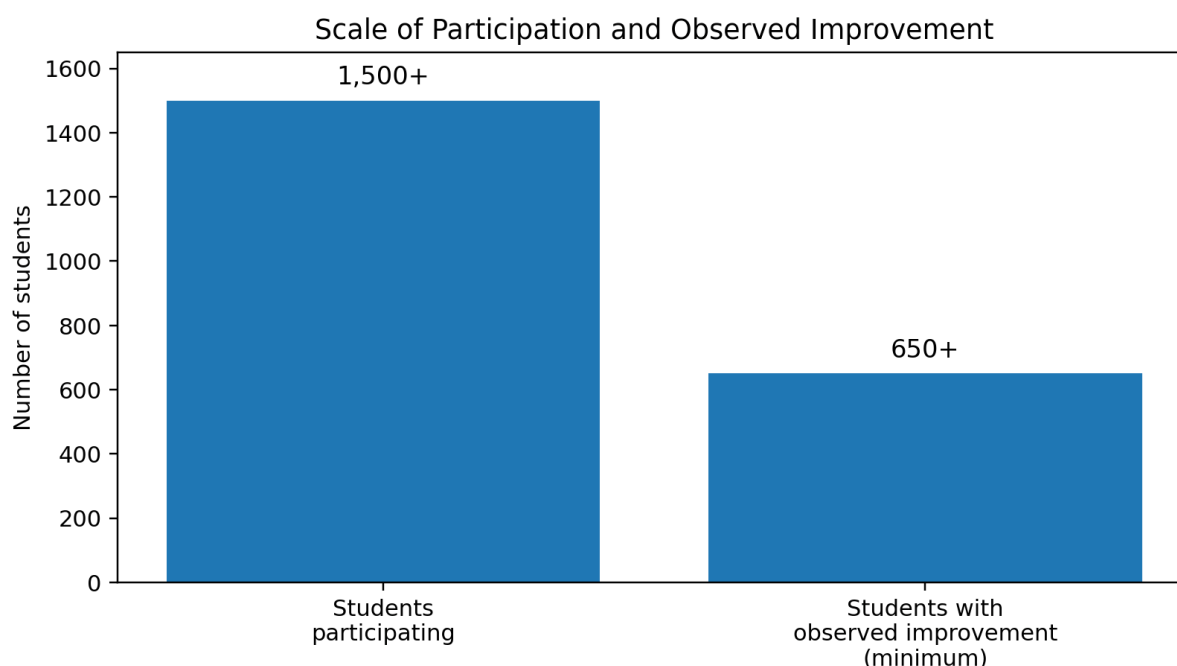
7.4 Data Analysis

Counts were taken directly from the supplied creative-writing and author documents. Photographs were interpreted as contextual implementation evidence rather than as measures of learning gain. The 650+ improvement figure supplied by the practitioner is reported as an observational minimum. No attempt was made to infer individual scores, class averages, percentages beyond the simple minimum calculation, or causal effects.

VIII. FINDINGS

8.1 Programme Reach

Approximately 1,500 students participated. The practitioner reports that improvement in reading-related engagement and literacy behaviours was observed among 650+ students. Using 650 as the conservative minimum, this corresponds to at least 43.3% of participants ($650 \div 1,500 \times 100$). Because the underlying observation sheets are not included in the supplied evidence, 43.3% should be read as a minimum proportion derived from the reported count, not as a standardized effect size.



650+ is a practitioner-reported minimum; it is not a standardized pre/post test result.

Figure 1. Scale of participation and the practitioner-reported minimum number of students showing observed improvement.

8.2 Storytelling and Read-Aloud as Shared Literacy

The supplied photographs document several forms of shared literacy. One photograph shows an adult storyteller engaging a seated group of children in a reading environment; another shows a classroom read-aloud with children attending to the teacher and a book; other photographs show storytelling with a puppet/character prop and children responding as an audience. These images demonstrate that literacy was enacted socially through listening, attention, interaction and performance.

This is consistent with the NCF Foundational Stage, which emphasises oral language development and describes read-alouds, stories and meaningful interaction as important components of language and literacy development [2].



Figure 2. Adult storytelling in a reading-rich environment, with children participating as an audience.



Figure 3. Classroom read-aloud interaction documented during the literacy initiative.



Figure 4. Puppet-supported storytelling, illustrating multimodal oral expression.

8.3 Recognition and Social Value of Reading

The photographs also document children receiving recognition in front of peers and adults. Such moments are relevant to a reading-culture intervention because they make literacy-related participation publicly visible and valued. The evidence does not establish that recognition caused later reading behaviour; it does, however, document the programme's use of social acknowledgement as part of the literacy environment.



Figure 5. Student recognition in a literacy-event setting.

8.4 Creative Writing: From Reader to Creator

The strongest documentary evidence of literacy extending beyond participation is the student writing collection. The supplied Story Writing document contains 28 documented submissions. The stories include recurring imaginative settings such as animal schools, magical objects, forests, libraries and classroom situations. Several stories contain dialogue, characterisation, a problem or challenge, a resolution and an explicit moral or message.

For example, one story imagines an animal school in which students learn cooperation and responsibility; another constructs a magical library that becomes visible to an animal who loves reading; another uses a talking pencil to communicate the value of original ideas. These are not treated as standardized writing scores. They are qualitative artefacts showing children using narrative structures and imaginative language to express ideas.



Figure 6. Student recognition and creative presentation within the Reading Mahotsav environment.

8.5 Poetry and Literary Expression

The supplied Poetry Writing document contains 15 documented poems. The collection includes Hindi and English writing and covers everyday and natural themes such as mountains, wind, rain, pets, the moon, school bags, pencils, school, peacocks, school buses and trees. The poems show children experimenting with description, repetition, rhythm, imagery and personal observation.

For example, the collection includes a rain poem using repeated sound imagery, a poem about a school bag that personifies the object as a companion, and poems about wind and trees. These artefacts support the interpretation that the literacy initiative created space for children to use language creatively rather than only answer comprehension questions.



Figure 7. Storytelling with a character prop, illustrating oral performance and imaginative engagement.

8.6 Emerging Young Authors

The Aspiring Authors Biodata document contains 14 student profiles. The profiles describe children who enjoy reading, storytelling, creative writing, fantasy, illustration and vocabulary development. Several profiles explicitly connect writing with imagination, communication, kindness, empathy or the desire to encourage other children to read and write.

The presence of these profiles is significant for the present study because it provides a visible bridge between reading culture and writing identity. The evidence does not establish that all 14 profiles were caused by Reading Mahotsav alone; rather, it demonstrates that the school environment included students who were actively developing identities as readers and writers.

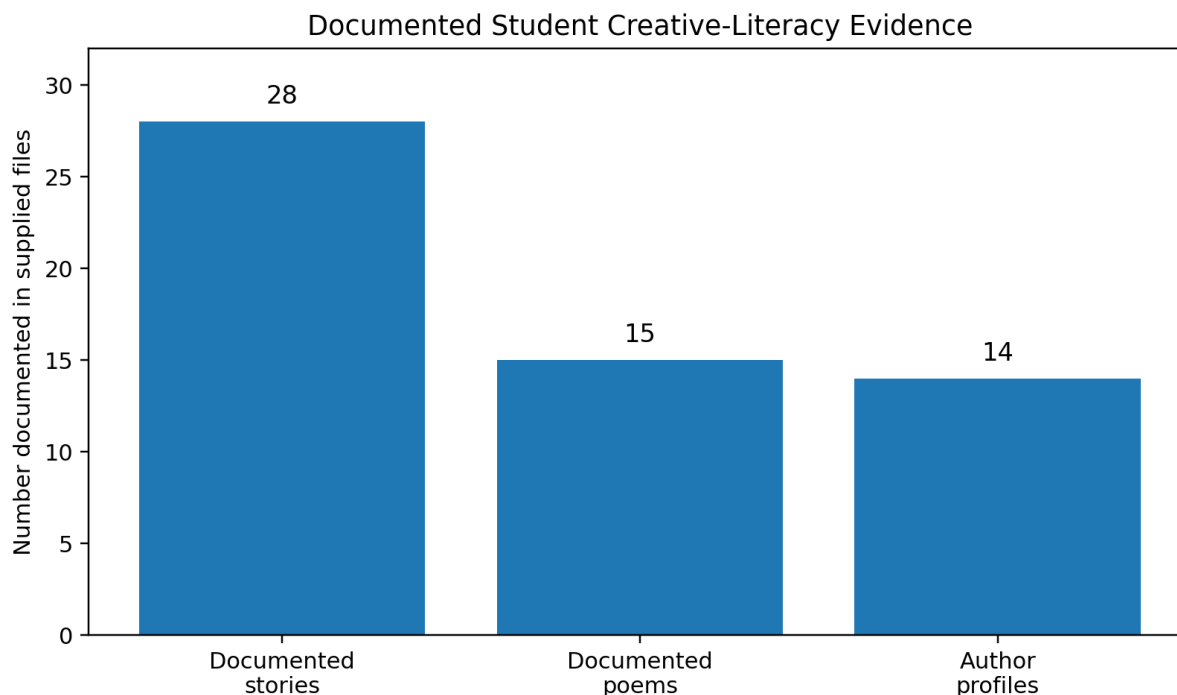


Figure 8. Documented creative-literacy outputs in the supplied evidence set: 28 stories, 15 poems and 14 author profiles.

8.7 Summary of Evidence

Indicator	Documented evidence	Interpretation
Student participation	Approx. 1,500	Large-scale reach reported by practitioner
Observed improvement	650+ students	Minimum observational count; not a standardized gain score
Story submissions	28 documented	Evidence of independent narrative production
Poetry submissions	15 documented	Evidence of creative language use in Hindi/English
Author profiles	14 documented	Evidence of emerging writing identities
Photographic evidence	6 supplied photographs	Direct contextual evidence of storytelling, reading and recognition

IX. DISCUSSION

The findings support a central proposition of this action research: a reading programme becomes more educationally meaningful when children are given opportunities to move between receptive and productive forms of literacy. The photographs document children listening to stories, interacting with adult storytellers, participating in read-aloud contexts and responding to character-based storytelling. The writing collections show that literacy engagement also extended into independent narrative and poetic production.

The NCF Foundational Stage places strong emphasis on oral language, stories, read-alouds, shared reading, meaning-making and exposure to engaging print material. It also recognises that written expression develops through oral language, interpretation and meaningful contexts [2]. NIPUN Bharat describes a culture of reading as involving motivation to engage with a variety of books and highlights the participation of family, community and school [3].

The programme's creative outputs are particularly important. Twenty-eight documented stories and fifteen documented poems show that children were not only receiving language but producing it. The stories include imaginative worlds, moral dilemmas, dialogue and narrative sequencing, while the poems include descriptive and personifying language. These artefacts provide richer qualitative evidence of engagement than attendance alone.

The practitioner-reported observation that 650+ students showed improvement is encouraging but must be interpreted cautiously. Without matched baseline and post-intervention measures, it cannot establish the magnitude of learning gain or causality. The appropriate conclusion is that a substantial number of students were observed to demonstrate positive change in reading-related engagement or literacy behaviours during the programme.

X. ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

Policy/framework	Relevant emphasis	Connection to Reading Mahotsav
NEP 2020	Foundational literacy, creative potential, language, arts and culture	Reading was connected with language, creativity, literature and student expression.
NCF Foundational Stage 2022	Oral language, stories, read-alouds, meaning-making, shared reading and written expression	Storytelling, read-alouds, discussion, creative response and writing formed a connected literacy pathway.
NIPUN Bharat	Reading fluency, reading comprehension and culture of reading; participation of family, community and school	The initiative sought to make reading a visible, social and engaging school experience.

NEP 2020 gives foundational literacy a central place in school education and also emphasises creative potential, language, arts and culture [1]. NIPUN Bharat identifies foundational literacy and a culture of reading as national priorities [3].

XI. LIMITATIONS

- The exact class-wise distribution of the approximately 1,500 participants is not available in the supplied evidence.
- The 650+ improvement figure is practitioner-reported observational evidence; the underlying matched observation sheets were not supplied.
- No completed pre/post questionnaire responses were supplied.
- No matched reading-fluency, vocabulary or comprehension scores were supplied.
- The 28 stories and 15 poems represent the documented collections supplied for this report and should not be interpreted as the total number of creative pieces produced unless independently verified.
- Photographs document activity contexts but cannot independently establish learning gains or causality.
- Identifiable student photographs should only be used in publication in accordance with the school's consent and safeguarding procedures.

XII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Student work should be used with appropriate school permissions.
- Identifiable photographs should be published only when required permissions have been obtained.
- Research datasets should use student codes rather than public names.
- Questionnaire and rubric responses should be stored securely.
- Observed improvement should be reported separately from measured learning gain.
- No scores should be invented or retrospectively altered to create a desired result.

XIII. CONCLUSION

Reading Mahotsav 2026–27 demonstrates the potential of a school-wide literacy initiative to move beyond reading as a narrowly academic activity. Approximately 1,500 students participated, and the practitioner reports that 650+ students showed observed improvement in reading-related engagement and literacy behaviours. The strongest documentary evidence, however, lies in the combination of photographs and student-generated literary work.

The supplied evidence includes 28 documented stories, 15 documented poems and 14 student author profiles. Together, these materials show children listening, imagining, narrating, composing, experimenting with language and sharing ideas. The programme therefore provides evidence for a meaningful movement from reader to creator: READ → LISTEN → DISCUSS → IMAGINE → CREATE → WRITE → SHARE.

The study deliberately does not claim a causal improvement in reading achievement because matched pre/post outcome data were not available. Its most defensible contribution is to document a large-scale, experiential literacy model and the creative responses it generated. A subsequent action-research cycle should preserve the programme's storytelling and creative strengths while adding systematic baseline and post-intervention measures.

In this sense, the central finding of Beyond Reading is not simply that children participated in reading activities. It is that a reading environment can create conditions in which children begin to see themselves as speakers, storytellers, poets and authors.

XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT ACTION-RESEARCH CYCLE

1. Administer the 15-item reading engagement questionnaire before and after the programme.
2. Use the 10-criterion teacher rubric with the same students at both time points.
3. Collect a short parallel reading-comprehension task before and after the intervention.
4. Maintain a class-wise participation tally.
5. Archive representative student stories, poems, drawings and reflections using student codes.
6. Record parent participation separately from student participation.
7. Analyse results by class/grade and report means, frequencies and percentages only where the underlying response counts are available.
8. Retain photographs as contextual evidence and pair them with written observation notes.
9. Use the same definitions of "improvement" throughout the measurement period.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ministry of Education, Government of India, "National Education Policy 2020," 2020.
- [2] Ministry of Education, Government of India, "National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage," 2022.
- [3] Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, "NIPUN Bharat Guidelines," 2021.
- [4] Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, "NIPUN Bharat: Foundational Learning Study 2022," 2022.

APPENDIX A. EVIDENCE INVENTORY

Item	Count/status	Use in paper
Student participants	Approx. 1,500	Reach
Observed improvement	650+	Observational finding
Story submissions	28 documented	Creative-literacy evidence
Poetry submissions	15 documented	Creative-literacy evidence
Author biodata profiles	14 documented	Emerging writer identity
Photographs supplied with this manuscript	6	Implementation/context evidence

APPENDIX B. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS FOR FUTURE MEASUREMENT

The following instruments are included to make the action-research cycle reproducible. They are not presented as completed results because no completed response dataset was supplied.

B.1 Student Reading Engagement Questionnaire

Response scale: 5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Not Sure; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree.

No.	Statement	5	4	3	2	1
1	I enjoy reading books.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I like listening to stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I like talking about stories with my friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I can describe my favourite character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I learn new words from stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I feel confident speaking about a story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I like choosing books independently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Stories help me imagine places, people and events.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I like asking questions about stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I can tell a story in my own words.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Stories help me understand different feelings and situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Stories help me understand values and traditions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I would like to read more books after participating in Reading Mahotsav.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	I like creating drawings, role plays or other responses to stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I enjoy sharing stories with my family.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Maximum score = 75. This questionnaire has no right/wrong answers. It measures self-reported reading engagement and should be administered in the same form before and after an intervention if used for pre/post analysis.

B.2 Teacher Observation Rubric

Criterion	4 – Consistent	3 – Developing well	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Listening and attention	Consistently attentive and responsive	Usually attentive	Attention varies	Frequently distracted
Story comprehension	Explains characters, events and meaning independently	Understands main events	Understands with prompts	Has difficulty understanding
Vocabulary	Uses new words accurately in context	Uses some new words	Recognises new words with help	Limited understanding
Oral expression	Speaks clearly and confidently	Speaks clearly with minor hesitation	Needs prompting	Reluctant to speak
Imagination	Provides original ideas/predictions	Provides relevant ideas	Ideas need support	Very limited response
Questioning and reasoning	Asks thoughtful questions and explains reasoning	Asks relevant questions	Responds when prompted	Rarely asks/responds
Participation	Actively participates	Participates regularly	Participates occasionally	Rarely participates
Creative response	Detailed, original response	Relevant response	Response with help	Limited response
Confidence	Volunteers and presents confidently	Participates confidently	Needs encouragement	Avoids participation
Connection to values/culture	Makes meaningful connections	Recognises relevant connections	Recognises with prompting	Limited connection

Maximum score = 40. For a future pre/post study, the same rubric should be used by trained observers at both time points.

B.3 Parent Feedback Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Yes	To some extent	No
1	My child discussed the story/activity at home.	☐	☐	☐
2	My child asked me to tell or read another story.	☐	☐	☐
3	My child used new vocabulary from the story.	☐	☐	☐
4	My child showed greater interest in books.	☐	☐	☐
5	My child narrated or retold part of a story at home.	☐	☐	☐
6	My child asked questions about the story.	☐	☐	☐
7	I participated in a Reading Mahotsav activity.	☐	☐	☐
8	The programme encouraged me to spend more time reading/telling stories with my child.	☐	☐	☐
9	I noticed greater confidence in my child's oral expression.	☐	☐	☐
10	I feel storytelling can strengthen a child's connection with family traditions and values.	☐	☐	☐

Suggested scoring for future analysis: Yes = 3; To some extent = 2; No = 1. Maximum = 30. This is an instrument, not a result dataset.

B.4 Student Reflection Sheet

My favourite story/activity was ...

I liked it because ...

One new word I learnt was ...

The character I liked most was ...

If I could change the ending, I would ...

The story made me feel ...

One thing I would like to read next is ...

I would like to share this story with ...

APPENDIX C. PUBLICATION NOTE ON PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs embedded in this manuscript are the images supplied by the practitioner for this research report. The earlier guest photograph/collage image referred to by the practitioner has been excluded from this manuscript and is not used as evidence.

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