

Title: The Power of Storytelling: Influencing the Thinking of Young Children

Author: Rebecca Isbell, Ed.D.

Affiliation of author:

Director of Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development,
East Tennessee State University

Address of the author:

Box 70434, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. 37614

Email address of the author: Isbell@ETSU.EDU

Abstract of the Paper:

Reading aloud and telling stories are effective ways to share literature with young children. Both have been found to support language and cognitive development during the preschool period. Story reading frequently occurs in early childhood settings and is valued as an important tool to enhance literacy development. While storytelling is widely recommended as an effective teaching practice, it is seldom included and is often viewed as non-essential in programs for young children.

This session will compare and contrast the influence of story reading and storytelling on the language and cognitive development of children. According to Kieran Egan (1996) the mind organizes best in story form. Mallen (1996) explains that the story told is essential to human existence. This technique has been used for hundreds of years and across many cultures to help educate children about history, morals and cultures. The experience of hearing a story told is very personal and can make unique connections to young children's thinking. Young listeners, regardless of their language skills, can understand the story told because it is communicated through words, vocal intonation, gestures, facial expressions and body movement.

Storytelling, which is a part of the oral tradition, connects to the language children use and has the potential to increase their understanding of the story while improving comprehension.

Drawing children into storytelling through active participation engages the listeners and creates a shared experience that bonds the teller and the young children. This co-creation is very different from the visual orientation of stories viewed by young children in today's media filled world. In storytelling the child visualizes and imagines the setting, characters and events of the story for his/her self.

Research that has investigated the impact of storytelling on young children's development will be shared and discussed. Specific aspects of these studies include: retelling fluency, story characteristics, use of narrative, vocabulary diversity, length of utterances and story comprehension. Examples of young children's responses to stories and their understanding of meaning will be included when studying the power of storytelling. An additional benefit for young children who have experienced storytelling is that they will become tellers of stories and writers of their own stories.

A story told by a teacher and retold by a young child is a powerful tool in early childhood education. Storytelling provides a pleasurable language experience that has the power to positively impact children's attitudes toward stories and influence their thinking about their world.