

CHILDREN RESPOND TO STORYTELLING

**THESIS**

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the  
Department of Education and Human Development  
State University of New York  
College at Brockport  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master's of Science in Education

by

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May 1997

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out directly from children what they think, feel and experience when listening to a story being told. Is the telling of stories merely a frivolous activity or a highly effective tool for resolving conflict, exploring values and enhancing language arts, and visualization skills?

The subjects were from three different classrooms. These were, respectively, a fourth grade classroom (n=13), a first grade classroom (n=9) and a kindergarten classroom (n=16). The students were exposed to the telling of two stories told by the same professional storyteller. Each group of children was observed during the storytelling session.

Following the telling of the stories, each classroom of students was divided into groups of three and interviewed about what they had heard, thought about, felt and visualized during and after the stories were told.

Data were analyzed through the constant comparative method. It was discovered that the telling of stories is influential in the following areas: values exploration, conflict resolution, visualization and language arts. Though this was not a longitudinal study, the findings suggest that listening to the telling of stories helps the listener to activate skills which are used during reading and other subject areas. The results also offer implications for the use of storytelling in the classroom, as well as possibilities for further research.

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## CHAPTER I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out directly from children what they think, feel, visualize and otherwise experience when listening to a story. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting mental and emotional processes of listeners and how it may be impacting the classroom at large.

#### Need For The Study

While there is some research on the effects of storytelling, it is scarce, particularly quantitative research. There appears to be more qualitative-type research on the subject; however, these studies are not labeled as such even though they incorporate all the characteristics of qualitative research. That is, they include keen observations and careful note taking.

Within the literature on storytelling by storytellers and professionals educators, there exists a strong belief that storytelling holds many benefits for those who have the opportunity to listen to stories and share their stories with others. Few of these same

advocates, however, have conducted their own studies on the subject nor do they seem to require positive research results to justify this practice. Perhaps the benefits are too obvious. Perhaps it is the mere fact that storytelling is such an old art and comes so naturally to humans that is to blame for the neglect of a more thorough investigation of it. Nevertheless, any research which could add to the understanding of storytelling in the classroom could only shed light on an ignored but spellbinding subject.

### Definition of Terms

**ESEA** - Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This was a government funded program to aid children who need remediation in the basic skills of reading and math.

**Imagery** - figurative language; mental images taken collectively; broadly the work of memory, imagination, or fancy

**Induced Imagery** - imagery strategies which, when suggested to the learner, generate pictorial representations for him or herself via internal visual images.

**Multi-lingual** - in educational settings, this refers to a classroom where there are two or more different languages spoken by the students collectively.

**Narrative** - any work of literature which takes the form of a story.

**Prose Content** - refers to the characterization and plot of a narrative.

**Schema** - prior knowledge obtained from either life experiences or direct instruction, which the learner brings to the learning situation.

**Storytelling** - the telling of stories, real or fictitious, using only one's voice, body and perhaps a prop, without the help of scenery or books.

**Title I** - government funded program to aid in the remediation of students who fall behind their peers in reading and math, and who are classified as economically underprivileged.

**Word Weaving Program** - an experimental storytelling program including folk tales, literary tales, and real stories, used to test the effects of the telling of stories as a language arts tool.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

There is a clear distinction between storytelling and reading aloud. Storytelling does not involve books or scenery of any kind. It is referred to here as it has existed in the ancient oral tradition. It has been described as a "folk art grown from the primal urge to give tongue to what has been seen, heard and experienced" (Sawyer, 1962, p. 72).

The Association for the Preservation and the Perpetuation of Storytelling defines storytelling as an "art form through which a storyteller projects mental and emotional images to an audience using the spoken word" (Livo & Rietz, 1986, p. 7). The fact that storytelling has remained with us for thousands of years is a testament in itself of the benefits of storytelling. What are those benefits and how do they translate into the landscape of curriculum guides and test scores? The answer lies in the results of both quantitative and qualitative research.

#### Conflict Resolution

In his book, The Uses of Enchantment, Bettelheim (1976) analyzes the stories of the folklore and fairy-tale tradition. In trying

to understand why these tales continue to enrich the inner life of children, he realized that "they (stories) speak about (the child's) inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands...and offers examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties" (p.6).

Anthropologist Megan Beisele (1993) studied the relevance of storytelling and its position of importance among the Bushman who live near the borders of the three countries of Botswana, Namibia, and Angola. She tells us that stories are a way to culturally reinforce the "right way" of doing things. They may offer possibilities to explore social and economic issues or may reflect real power struggles that exist within that society. Stories shared in the oral tradition also serve to negotiate balance among this society as a whole.

Educators and psychologists recommend the use of stories to aid in conflict resolution in the classroom. In a textbook designed to teach those studying to be teachers, Kreidler (1984) suggests that at the time of conflict in the classroom, the teacher can create a story beginning with "Once upon a time...", incorporating the names of the disgruntled children and their situation into the story and then allowing the children to resolve the problem they were having by giving their fictional characters a resolved ending.

In stories, one's fears, dreams and frustrations can be resolved safely. Whether one is listening to or telling a story, the narrative itself becomes the stage where internal conflicts can be played out. In a

world where adults are in control, and in many cases, encourage children to repress unpleasant thoughts or feelings, children may find the non-threatening world of stories to be particularly attractive. In her observations of nursery school children, Paley (1990) used stories that she told and those of the children, to gain insight into the feelings and thoughts of her students. Paley noticed that through stories, secrets and urgencies were revealed that would not have surfaced otherwise.

The writer and child psychologist, Robert Coles (1989) encouraged his patients to share their personal stories with him. In this way he was able to better understand the psychological and ideological make-up of his patients. He heard stories that were full of memories, hopes and constant worries. He suggests to doctors and teachers alike that stories can reveal much more crucial information about people than cryptic, dry, structured accounts that these professionals tend to encourage when trying to diagnose a problem.

In her book Storyteller Storyteacher, Gillard (1996) writes: "Stories... help us know ourselves and see that we are not alone in our pain and fear. Through stories we make sense of the sometimes messy moments of our lives". (p. 85).

### Exploring Values

In addition to providing the stage for resolving conflict, many commonly told folk tales often contain a lesson or a moral. This can be

seen in a good number of the Brothers Grimm stories that many people knew as children. Often themes like hard work, honesty, perseverance, kindness and fairness work their way into traditional folk tales and popular modern tales. As educators we can also see these same themes in the stories our students may tell us. Whatever the source of the stories may be, storytelling time can be used as a vehicle to explore some of these philosophical points. This would be similar to the discussions which surround literature.

To show that stories, whether written or told, can impact the values of those who are exposed to them, one can refer to a study conducted by Mariano (1996) on the effects of moral literature on middle school students. The null hypothesis that this type of literature would have no effect on the students was rejected. Before and after the reading of moral literature, subjects were given a test to determine their knowledge of value issues and the influence these have on behavior and beliefs (SIQ-R Test adaptation). The difference between pre and post experiment test scores was a *t* analysis value of -4.06. These scores reflect the fact that this sample of students was influenced by the moral literature that they read. The discussion that followed the research also revealed that the students were "delighted" to be given the chance to read, write, and discuss those beliefs which impact their behavior.

Another interesting piece of research not only confirmed the motivating power of stories on behavior, but it also correlated the

importance of narrative when conveying certain ideas (Eisley & Merrill 1984). The researchers gave the subjects written accounts of virtuous characters only through internal descriptions such as the character's beliefs and feelings. They called this design "substance." Then the researchers had the subjects read about the same character but this time the emphasis was on the character's behavior and the plot line. They called this design "context." In the third design, the students read about the characters in a passage which combined both substance and context. Students identified the virtue in the characters to an equal degree in both the first and second designs. The third design, however, where both substance and context were combined, increased the story receivers' ability to perceive virtue in the characters. This study, in particular, supports the premise that it is oftentimes not enough to convey or try to teach values directly. From these results it can clearly be seen that it is the structure of the narrative itself which most effectively conveys its lessons.

For centuries, leaders of the world religions have been using stories to convey that particular religion's value system. In various denominations of Christian faith, priests, pastors and ministers continue to use the parables of Jesus, found in the Gospels of the New Testament. Just as Jesus used these stories to convey moral teachings, so do Christian leaders (Pellowski, 1987). In addition, many personal and contemporary stories are often shared with congregations to underscore the theme of a given sermon. Stories do not have to be

"time tested" or accepted in the classic sense. More often than not, it is the most personal of stories which reach us.

Isaac Bashevis Singer tells of the traditional of the oral sharing of tales centered around Hanukkah in his book The Power of Light (Singer, 1976) and in Hindu many stories are prevalent as well. Most Hindi tales are handed down orally and are not written down. These stories are shared by many Hindi elders in an effort to teach how to live the Hindu faith. The same holds true for Moslems, Buddhists and Confucianists (Pellowski, 1987).

It can be seen from the literature on storytelling and values that storytelling can be an opportunity to discuss and learn about different beliefs and folk legends of the world, as well as the reasons behind the rules of the classroom, school and surrounding community.

Storytelling in the public school or secular private school need not be used as a forum for a teacher or storyteller to impose his or her faith into the classroom. As the previously mentioned studies suggest, one of the purposes of sharing stories is to give students the opportunity to use their higher level thinking skills to analyze and to reflect on these values. Finally, it has been demonstrated that the narrative and characterization found in stories can illustrate the benefits of virtues such as courtesy, patience, and generosity in an entertaining and fanciful way.

## Visualization

Unlike looking at movies, television or pictures books, or even listening to a book being read, listening to a storyteller, using only his voice, language, body and perhaps a prop, to paint pictures, requires the engaged imaginations of the listeners. Without this mental activation in the minds of the audience, there is no story. Storytelling depends on the skills of the listeners as well as the teller (Martin, 1996).

According to the research of George and Schaer (1986) storytelling is a viable method for stimulating children's imaginations. This, they concluded, leads to higher cognitive functioning. Their study was specifically conducted to determine which of three imagery methods was most effective in helping children to recall prose content. The methods tested were dramatization, storytelling and video presentation. The scores of the students who were in the dramatization treatment group and the storytelling treatment group were 2.98 and 2.93 respectively. These scores were statistically significantly higher than the score of the students in the video treatment group, which was 2.27, in recalling prose content.

Visual imagery is an information processing strategy. Klinger (1980) suggests that imagery "represents the central core of perceptual, retrieval and response mechanisms" (p. 78). In a study conducted by Forest (1981), he found that imagery can be used to aid

in purely visual processing problems in addition to providing a foothold to overcome and remedy non-visual problems. Forrest goes on to suggest a number of imagery enhancement aids. One of those he suggests is listening to descriptive stories.

There is a moderate relationship between visual imagery skills and the severity of a language learning disability. Imagery instructions facilitate learning verbal, procedural and spatial information (Hodes, 1992). In this study conducted to decide what would induce the use of imagery, it was found that illustrations as well as direct instruction could work; the implications being that imagery plays an important part in the learning process, and that visual imagery can be strengthened like many other cognitive skills.

The results of a study by Whitmire and Stone (1991) imply that a deficiency in imaging is related to poor comprehension. In this investigation the researchers main objective was to determine if there was a relationship between performance tasks and a) severity of language learning disability and b) specific language skills. The Test of Language Development-Primary was used to measure language skills. To measure imagery proficiency The Minnesota Paper Form Board-Test (MPFB), The Primary Mental Abilities-Test (PMA), and the Kulman-Finch Space Test (KF), were administered. Four significant correlations involving image scores and specific language subdomains were revealed for the language-learning disabled (LLD) group. These were; Listening Quotient ( $r=.61$ ) and the Semantics Quotient ( $r=.45$ )

of the MPFB, and the Semantics Quotient ( $r=.59$ ) and the Speaking Quotient ( $r=.45$ ) on the KF.

Visual imagery then, is related to comprehension. This may be due to the advantage of picturing during reading (Long, Winograd & Bridge 1989). Storytelling is one of the ways to enhance this skill. This, however, is only one way in which storytelling has been found to be a useful pedagogic tool.

### Language Arts

There is more research which shows that storytelling is a useful strategy in the language arts curriculum. Farrell and Nessel (1982) examined the effects of The Word Weaving Program, an experimental storytelling program. The study was conducted over a one year period. The control subjects were two groups of 13 primary grade students randomly chosen from a kindergarten and third grade classroom where Word Weaving was not implemented and whose teachers did not use storytelling in their classrooms. The experimental subjects were randomly chosen from the kindergarten and first grade classes of teachers identified as users of Word Weaving. Four measures of language usage were obtained: fluency (total number of words used), vocabulary (number of different words used) descriptive language, (number of different adverbs and adjectives used) and recall (story elements). An analysis of variance and a  $t$  test were used to compare

the groups. Results showed that the experimental group improved significantly in the areas of fluency and story recall. In addition, the teachers involved unanimously attested to storytelling's benefits.

In a study which involved an ESEA Title 1 program, the researcher set out to find if storytelling did make a difference in language development. The subjects were kindergarten and first grade children. Data were collected at the beginning and at the end of the school year. Each day during the year the students were told or read stories by their teachers. The teachers were trained by professional storytellers in the art of storytelling. Comparisons were made of the subjects use of vocabulary and sentence length, in the fall and in the spring. The research indicated that the benefits of listening to stories told (or sometimes read) were shown in the increases made in the Title I children between fall and spring (Delano, 1977). (Note: the fact that the researcher uses the term "storytelling" to encompass reading aloud, slightly diminishes the study's support of storytelling, though not completely as storytelling was an integral part of the study.)

Betty Rosen (1988) recorded her findings of the effectiveness of storytelling on a multi-lingual, multi-cultural English class in an all boys high school in London, England. At the time of her observations the surrounding neighborhoods had been in a state of social upheaval. Many of the boys had emotional and learning problems. Rosen told both personal stories and fables and encouraged the boys to tell their own. These were often used as material for the boys' writing. The

most concrete benefits of Rosen's instruction surfaced at the time of the boys' graduation. There was a 20% increase in the number of students who achieved a secondary proficiency pass in English over a 5 year period. These results were from boys whose first language was not English.

It has also been reported that storytelling as an integral part of the classroom can help increase the vocabulary. In her work with students in Hungary who were taking English as a second language, King (1993) told her students stories that contained vocabulary words far above their proficiency level. King found that despite ignorance of many of these words, the dynamics involved in storytelling, which differed from her reading of stories, and the free discussion that followed, allowed and motivated the students to ask about the meaning of these words and to use these words themselves in their writing and speaking.

Sharing one's own stories, even if they are short and anecdotal, can connect one to literature, whether it be reading stories or writing one's own accounts. In her work with Leonard, a native American boy whose writing skills were falling far behind that of his peers, Wason-Ellam (1993) discovered that literary conversations about books helped Leonard to see the connection of real life to literature. Although these sessions started out by centering on the text at hand and the children's responses to them, more and more the children were sharing their own stories. This kind of oral sharing was linking the group members to

each other and to the books being read. Eventually, one of Leonard's oral stories became the frame for a written one. He came to see the relationship between the written word and the spoken one. Storytelling was an integral part of that process.

To further build the case for the necessity of stories, Bruner (1986) breaks down human cognition into two modes of thought: the narrative and the logio-scientific. This recognition that narrative plays a key role in the human thought process, helping us to order the world of real and imagined experience, sets the stage for advocacy of the implementation of the ancient art of storytelling in our schools.

### Summary

The work of the professional educators, researchers, psychologists and anthropologist cited in this chapter provides substantial justification for the implementation of storytelling in the classroom. In addition to being a colorful and creative way to capture the attention of school children, the research reveals the possible uses of this ancient form of communication.

The skills involved in conflict resolution, values formation, visualization and language arts have been enhanced, directly and indirectly, by the use of storytelling in educational settings and elsewhere. These studies strongly imply that storytelling is more than a

frivolous activity. It has been used successfully as a tool to aid in the teaching and development of listening, speaking, writing and interpersonal skills.

## CHAPTER III

### Design of the Study

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out directly from children what they think, feel, visualize and otherwise experience when listening to a story being told. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting mental and emotional processes of listeners and how it may be impacting the classroom at large.

#### Question

What do children think, feel, visualize and otherwise experience during and after hearing a story being told?

#### Methodology

##### Subjects

The subjects were heterogeneously grouped first graders (n=9), fourth graders (n=13) and kindergarten students (n=16). All classes were from schools in the same metropolitan area in upstate New York. All subjects except the kindergarten class were from the same public school building. The kindergarten class was from a private nursery school.

## Materials

- tape recorder
- set of interview questions to be asked of the students during one-to-one interview
- markers
- storybook paper (usually found in pre-school and kindergartens; has room for a picture above and two to three lines of text below.)

## Procedures

Subjects were involved in a storytelling session with a professional storyteller. The same storyteller told to each of the three groups. The researcher audiotaped the storyteller and the reactions of the children during the storytelling session. Thorough observations were made by the researcher with the aid of previously mentioned materials. The researcher also took notes of her observations.

When the stories were being told the researcher listened carefully to the stories, while at the same time, watching the children. With the kindergartners and fourth graders, this was done somewhat away from the group and to the side. With the first grade subjects, observations were conducted while sitting amongst the children. The kindergarten and fourth grade sessions allowed for two stories to be told. The first grade sessions allowed for only one story. In each case, observations lasted until all stories were finished being told.

Following the session, students were interviewed in groups of three or four. Interviews were tape recorded. All students were asked questions which dealt with visualization, conflict resolution, values, and various language arts skills (such as, vocabulary, sequencing, inferring, cause and effect). Questions were story specific (see Appendix). Questions of the interview were open ended. They were questions which elicited answers requiring original thought. Questions which biased or lead the participant were avoided wherever possible. The interviewer was conscious of allowing the interviewee to explain even those concepts which seemed to be obvious or simple. In this way a more objective and exploratory attitude guided the investigation.

### Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed qualitatively using the constant comparative method. This method is characterized by the collection and organizing of data into categories. Categories are established based on emerging patterns from the collected information. In this way, as the data are collected they can be compared to already gathered data in the hopes that any patterns which exist will emerge. In most forms of case studies, formal analysis and theory development do not occur until after the data collection is near completion. In case studies which incorporate the constant comparative method, formal analysis begins

early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection. Theory development is ongoing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

The steps of the constant comparative method of developing theory are laid out as follows:

1. Begin data collection.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories for focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.
4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic patterns of social interaction.
6. Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories.

Glaser points out that although this method might appear to be a series of steps, the procedures outlined in the above list are followed all at once (Glaser, 1987).

Data collected in this study during observations, interviews and picture evaluation were analyzed in this manner.

## CHAPTER IV

### Analysis of the Data

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out directly from children what they think, feel, visualize and otherwise experience when listening to a story being told. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting mental and emotional processes of listeners, and how it may be impacting the classroom at large.

#### Findings and Interpretations

This study involved relatively few students. It was not a longitudinal study, which would have involved several storytelling sessions conducted over a long period of time, after which measures would be taken to determine effects. The aim of this study was to find out by observation, interviews and analysis of pictures how the subjects of the study responded to storytelling.

Despite the limited number of subjects, patterns emerged which confirmed the theories of others researchers and writers regarding the

effects of storytelling. Within the discovered categories, sub-categories also became apparent.

Consistent with the findings of other researchers presented in Review of the Literature, the following four categories: conflict resolution, values, language arts and visualization, became the areas of focus. Within these areas, questions were designed to allow for any other patterns or tendencies to be revealed. Interviews with the subjects of this study also brought various sub-categories to the surface which need to be acknowledged.

### Values and Conflict Resolution

Although outlined separately in Chapter Two, the areas of values and conflict resolution were very much intertwined. When the students were in agreement or discord about the way characters in the story resolved their differences, the explanation that followed almost always revealed the values beneath that feeling. For this reason, these two categories can be examined simultaneously.

### Creative problem Solving

A majority of the children had definite opinions about the manner in which conflicts were resolved. Some were in agreement and some were clearly not. When the researcher questioned the students further for reasons which would explain their feelings, they were not so quick to answer. Many paused heavily and seemed to search the room

for the precise answer. In this way, the interviewer engaged the students in critical thinking. Like literature, storytelling can be a vehicle for this type of question and answer exchange.

The children showed surprising maturity in their responses. After a story about a monkey who steals vegetables from Mrs. Stork's garden, the kindergartners were asked, "What could the monkey have done instead?" Some decided that he could have simply asked for some vegetables before stealing them. Another students thought the monkey should have offered to work for the vegetables.

After the story about the giant's wife, Clever Una, who saved her husband, the giant Fin McCull from being beaten up by another giant Cul Cullen, the students were asked if they thought that Una had done the right thing. Many thought she had because "It's not good to fight." or, "He could have been hurt." Others felt that Finn should have stood up to the other giant or that Clever Una shouldn't intrude into an other's business. The wife also lied about several things in the story and had her husband pose as a baby to disguise himself. This last event upset many of the children, especially the boys, who felt that it was wrong and frustrating to see a grown man acting like a baby. Many thought that it was wrong of Clever Una to lie. In fact, some thought that her lying deemed her not so clever. Reason: it is wrong to lie.

### Self Identification

The stories told, although they were about giants fighting and monkeys stealing vegetables, served the purpose of self identification.

The answers the children gave, more often than not, included some aspect of their lives. Whether this entailed simple detail or similar situations they had been in, the stories lent themselves well to motivating the children to tell their own stories which related to the story at hand. The children seemed familiar with the personality types of the main characters. Some of the students were able to see the behavior of people they knew reflected in the behavior of the characters.

### Visualization

When the subjects were asked about how they pictured various characters and settings, few declined to answer. Some were hesitant, some were eager, but the majority of those interviewed had visualized the story in their minds. Using their imaginations and drawing on their schema, the children had distinct pictures painted in their minds of the images spoken of in the stories. For some, the giant wore torn clothes (because his muscles were so big), for others he wore sweat pants or shorts. One boy pictured the giant carrying a barbell around the house. Another boy said, "I would put some cave man clothes on him with some overalls and have a little bit of hair. He would be very tall." The readiness on the part of the children to share their mental images verbally, or through the use of pictures indicated the occurrence of

quickly forming detailed images quite soon after the story was underway.

The discussions with children about their mental images, revealed those scenes of the story which made the most impression on them or at least carried the basic plot or theme of the story for each child. Images seemed to help them remember. Regardless of the questions (whether they referred to descriptions or morals) all subjects used objects or actions from the story to illustrate their point.

### Language Arts

#### Recall

King (1993) described the dynamic of storytelling as distinct from that of reading aloud. The subjects observed during the storytelling sessions in this study could be described as completely engaged. Their attention was focused on the storyteller from the beginning of the story to the end. During several interview sessions when the students were asked questions about the story, many of them retold a small bit of it (a character quote or an event) in the same exact intonation and style of the storyteller in order to answer the question. It appeared as though most of the recall of story elements was aided specifically by the presentation and animation of the storyteller. During the stories being told, one could hear various verbal responses from gasps to laughter, to pitiful cries and shrieks of surprise.

There were many facts to remember in each of the stories. Students did remarkably well in recalling these facts. Often the recall of these facts was related to the interviewer in direct association with the storyteller's expression. Of the three groups interviewed, the first grade group of nine students contained a majority of children with emotional difficulties, which included problems with focusing. Even this group had remarkable recall in spite of the fact that these children could hardly sit still during the interview and were somewhat restless during the storytelling.

#### Prediction and Context

Several times the storyteller asked the children if they could guess what was going to happen next. This gave the students several opportunities to make predictions. At many times during the storytelling the teller would hesitate purposely or incidentally. At these times the children would finish the sentence themselves. This gave the students an opportunity to practice their semantic and syntactic skills.

#### Schema

In order to fill in the blank correctly and make semantic sense, the students would have had to rely on their prior knowledge of the settings and plots of these kinds of fables, the repetitive patterns found in the plot line of the story, or most likely, they would use both of these strategies in combination.

The practice of the storyteller in this study, and many other storytellers, was to provide some background knowledge, which relates to the tale that they are about to tell, before the telling begins. Often these tales were traditional folk tales told of far away lands and far away times. In these cases the teller would typically offer a small amount of information in order to explain an outdated concept or object. Even when stories were more contemporary, some clarification usually preceded a storytelling. This corresponded to questions or vocabulary that a teacher may provide and review with her students prior to reading a textbook or a piece of fiction. In this way, the listeners' schema was being augmented.

During the telling itself the listeners were also required to elicit and use any prior knowledge they may have had. This was apparent during the interview sessions. When being asked to describe the setting of a giant story, one fourth grader remarked that the house would be polkadot. This was not a detail of the told story. When asked why she would draw the house in that design, she commented, "Then, they used to have stuff like that." In a drawing by a kindergartner about the same story, a little girl drew the giant's wife wearing a puffy sleeved smock and a skirt. She wore her hair in two tight buns on the side of her head. This style was reminiscent of the peasant women found in the illustrations of folk tales and even of

certain Walt Disney movies. Clearly these girls had a very particular image of how one dressed and painted their houses when giants roamed about. To make the story come alive in their minds this schema had to be activated.

### Vocabulary

During each story that was told at least one new term was introduced with or without explanation. In the interview that followed students were asked what many of these words meant. For those words with which the students were unfamiliar, the students seemed to be using context clues to try to guess at the word. On these occasions the students efforts were not without success. One out of ten students guessed correctly, but most of those who did not guess the correct word, chose a word that made semantic and syntactic sense and came quite close to the correct meaning of the word. In addition, these children were exposed to a new word which was an integral part of the story.

### Tellings and Retellings

As was touched on in the first section, the discussion after the stories were told showed that the children were ready to retell part of the story in their answers, talk about themselves or share stories that they knew. They seemed to be very eager to be listened to when the

storyteller asked some of them to share stories they knew. They also were enthusiastic when the interviewer asked them to share their own thoughts and stories which related somehow to the story that had just been told.

### Summary

It was clear that all students were engaged and most were entranced during the storytelling sessions. The researcher noticed that the students paid attention to the storyteller from beginning to end. Even though storytelling events went on occasionally in these same schools, the children reacted as though this was a curious and novel happening that deserved their undivided attention. In adherence to the tradition of storytelling, the storyteller did not use books or scenery.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion and Implications

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out directly from children what they think, feel, visualize and otherwise experience when listening to a story being told. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting mental and emotional processes of listeners, and how it may be impacting the classroom at large.

#### Conclusion

The results of this study suggest a number of conclusions that can be drawn about the uses of storytelling in the classroom. These conclusions are summarized in this chapter.

This study examined the benefits to be had from exposing students to storytelling experiences. These benefits overlap into more than one area of instruction and influence the development of several cognitive skills.

As teachers, it is our hope that we might teach our students to think critically and to become creative problem solvers. The values and conflicts found in stories combined with the oral tradition of

storytelling, encouraged these children to explore their values and to share these explorations aloud.

In many of the interview sessions, the students used the events in the story to reflect upon their own lives. They did this verbally and in small groups. In this way, the exploring was interpersonal as well as intrapersonal. It was also cooperative.

The visualization that has been known to aid in reading was activated by the tales told. Almost every student was able to form an image of the characters or the setting in his or her mind. Evidence of the forming of images was one of the most remarkable discoveries of the research. Visualization also seemed to aid in memorization of the events of the story which in turn aided the children in discussion of bigger concepts.

Under the heading of language arts, recall was a skill which seemed to be strengthened greatly by having the students listen to and watch a live storyteller.

The questions asked by the storyteller during the stories gave the listeners many opportunities to use prediction skills. This also gave them many chances to use context clues and to demonstrate their understanding of semantics and syntax.

The probability that there was acquisition of new vocabulary was the least evident. Follow up was not done to see if the students had implemented any of the new vocabulary words heard in the stories. The stories told did expose the students to these terms for the first time

or perhaps for a second time. Many of these terms were story specific and somewhat outdated. Again, it was the animation of the storyteller which seemed to reinforce the understanding of any unknown words.

In the interviews that followed, it was obvious that the students needed to rely on their background knowledge to construct meaning from the what they were hearing. This was particularly noticeable when the settings were not familiar to them. The interview process showed that some of the students possessed more background knowledge than others. In either case some schema had to be activated. For those with experiential deficiencies, the missing schema was creatively replaced. This gave the researcher a clear picture of who was in need of exposure to more varied experiences.

Finally, in the area of language arts, it should be again pointed out that the oral sharing of stories followed by discussion seemed to encourage the children to express themselves through their own stories. These opportunities to tell original anecdotes and retell parts of the story gave them practice in speaking skills which are the prelude to writing skills.

### Implications for Further Research

The results of this study point to several areas which necessitate further research.

Longitudinal studies are needed to track the influence of exposure to storytelling in order to find whether the effects of this exposure are substantial and far reaching. The researchers of projects such as these should take careful notes of their observations and involve teachers as co-researchers.

The areas in this study should be broken down as subjects of more specific studies. These studies should include control groups and test specific skills that may or may not be strengthened significantly. Research about newly acquired vocabulary, effects of visualization on reading ability of a similar subject, story element recall during a read aloud, silent reading or storytelling session and creative conflict resolution abilities, name just some of the possibilities for further research. Ideally, subjects would be children who had experienced many months of storytelling experiences and children who had not experienced the same amount of storytelling.

### Implications for the Classroom

The dynamic of storytelling offers the classroom a high interest language arts activity where many of these tales are usually fantasy type stories. Storytelling is like live theater, with the actions and intonations of the story being told. The comprehension of the plot line and basic characteristics of the main players are not reliant upon the reading ability of the receiver.

Oftentimes educators may give their students real literature to read which either the teacher or the students have chosen because these books interest them or relate to their lives. Often these books may use colloquialisms that, when heard, are understood. This is delightful for the skilled reader, but for the reader with poor reading skills, connectedness to the characters does not happen as easily, regardless of the book's relevance to real life. With storytelling, all are able to enjoy narratives without the threat of having to perform.

Although literature also sets the stage for creative conflict resolution, reading does not capture a young audience in the same way storytelling can. In the words of Brenda Ueland, "Writing is talking on paper." If this is true, reading could be compared to listening to talk on paper. Storytelling can be a bridge over which a reluctant reading may gladly cross on his way to reading avidly. This is often the case.

With all the efforts of educational professionals to empower students to make decisions about some educational choices, many classrooms still follow a lecture type format, where the teacher talks and the students listen. Being exposed to storytelling and allowing cooperative discussion afterwards sends a clear message to students that their ideas and opinions count and that talk can be educational. It also teaches them that one does not need an electronic device or prefabricated visual picture to be enthralled and engaged.

Storytelling by a teacher, professional and the children themselves can enhance memory, correct use of context, schema and prediction skills, to name a few. It is a literary based activity which can connect real life to the world of books, which often seems to exist outside of day-to-day experiences. Without this connection, literature can seem boring and even intimidating.

With technological advances increasing astronomically, it is difficult to believe that the live telling of a story could hold the attention of students whose experiences with the technical world are far more advanced than those of students ten years ago. Yet, the observations of the subjects in this study found this to be the case.

Stories are personal and the telling of real or imagined stories bring personal truths to the surface in amusing and serious ways. Many young people are dealing with issues which were quite hidden not very long ago. Issues like violence, drug use, missing children and divorce can cause children to feel unsafe. Stories can address these fears.

Whether it is in a bus station, the classroom or at Grandmother's house during dinner, stories are a way to connect with other human beings. Perhaps this explains the perseverance of an art form that has been with us since the beginning of humankind. For the educational community to dismiss the necessity of storytelling, would be to dismiss the structure upon which human communication was built.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

If you were going to draw a picture of \_\_\_\_\_ (one of the principal characters in the stories) what would he/she look like?

What would that picture include?

What in the story makes you think that?

Do you know what the setting of a story is?

What would you include in your picture of the setting?

What in the story makes you think it looked like that?

How does the story make you feel ? (Overall what did you feel during the telling of the story?)

What in the story made you feel that way?

Identify the problem. What was it?

Have you ever been faced with a problem like that before?

What did you do?

What did you think about before you made your choice?

How do you feel about (what do you think of) the choice that \_\_\_\_\_ (one of the characters) made?

Did \_\_\_\_\_ (one of the characters) do the right thing? Why?

What should he/she have done?

What does \_\_\_\_\_ (a vocabulary word from the story) mean?

Why did the storyteller use the word tied (example) instead of plaited (example)?

Which of these events came first? (At this time, three events from the story are stated out of order).

Why did \_\_\_\_\_ (a character) do \_\_\_\_\_ (state an action)?

Who was smarter, \_\_\_\_\_ (a character), or \_\_\_\_\_ (another character from the same story)?

Specific questions from the Irish folk tale "Clever Una":

Why are giants often not very smart?

Why do you think Clever Una and Finn decided not to kill Cul Cullen in the end?

What were Finn's magic powers?

What were Cul Cullen's magic powers?

Specific questions from "Mrs. Stork and Her Garden":

What would you have done if you were the monkey?

Should the monkey have been invited to the dinner party? Why/why not?