

**SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT**

**A COMPARISON OF FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS' LISTENING  
BEHAVIORS USING TWO PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES:  
STORYTELLING AND READ ALOUD**

**by**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of storytelling and reading aloud on fifth grade students' listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique. What presentation technique motivates a student to listen and what could we expect to observe when this is occurring?

The subjects were from two different classrooms. There were 23 from one fifth grade class and 24 from the other classroom. They remained in their own classrooms for the procedure. The students were presented with the telling of two stories told by the same professional storyteller. One story had been memorized and was told without the use of a book, while the other was a story that was read from a book, called a read aloud. Each group of children was observed during the storytelling and read aloud sessions.

Notes were taken during the presentations on the behaviors that students exhibit. Following each story, each classroom completed a short questionnaire. After their second, or final presentation, they completed a long form questionnaire, consisting of questions that would indicate how they felt during the

presentations, their preference, and what they comprehended as well.

Student questionnaires were collected and analyzed for common responses. The researcher looked for correlation between overt interest and active listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique.

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## CHAPTER I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of storytelling and reading aloud of fifth grade students' listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting cognitive and affective processes of listeners and how it may be influencing the classroom environment.

#### Need for the Study

New York State Standards consider listening a significant element in the English Language Arts Program. The NYSELA Assessment tests, now given to students in grades 4, and 8, consist of reading, writing and listening sections. As educators prepare to implement instruction to meet the higher learning standards, each aspect of literacy needs further development. While exploring ways to motivate student listening is often overlooked, teachers often complain of the consequences of poor listening.

Although there is an increase in the discussions surrounding effective listening, little research has been done to determine what motivates a student to listen and what teachers can do to develop conscious listening. "Although they comprise only a fraction of the school day, periods devoted to storytelling, role playing and creative dramatics can contribute much toward the growth of good listening habits among children" (Briggs, 1970, p. 135). Storytelling provides the kind of drama required to hold students' attention for literacy development activities (Cooter, 1991).

While there is some research on the effects of storytelling, it is scarce and often limited to a small population of subjects. Most literature surrounding storytelling in the classroom focuses on how it increases students' comprehension. Data are collected by picture drawings and sequencing story events.

Storytellers believe that storytelling holds many benefits for those who listen and share stories with others. Within the literature, the tellers have commented on the intent expressions of interest and excitement in the audience. As it is difficult to determine exactly what is going on in the mind of the beholder, any research that can add to a child's perspective of storytelling in the classroom can befriend the educator before them.

### Definition of Terms

**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 or perhaps a prop, without the help of scenery or books.

**Read Aloud**- the reading of a story from a book.

**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.

**ELA** - New York State English Language Arts tests that are given in grades 4 and 8. They consist of a reading, writing and listening section.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

“Teachers and curriculum builders have assumed that because a child could hear, that he could automatically listen and comprehend” (Briggs, 1970, p. 135). However, even if a child’s auditory perception is normal, the listening behavior that the child develops is not naturally equivalent to be a conscious level of listening and therefore, understanding. Teachers constantly request students to pay attention and listen well, but are students interested in listening to their teachers?

A student may stop listening when he becomes exhausted or loses interest. As Briggs (1970) reported, “A cause of poor listening behavior may grow out of instructional procedure. Children are not challenged and stimulated by a dull rehash of textbook assignments which frequently terminate in a “ping-pong” type question and answer period” (p. 135). In addition, a child cannot adjust the speed or pace of a speaker. With the traditional linguistic style lesson, if a child focuses his attention elsewhere, then a majority of the instruction may not be initially comprehended. Motivation is a

Motivation is a significant contributing factor in the degree of pupil listening. What presentation technique motivates a student to listen and what could we expect to observe when this is occurring?

In a paper entitled *Listening and Reading in the Elementary School*, author Marlow Edigar stresses the importance of listening. Edigar lists five pointers to develop pupils who listen well: the speaker should have something interesting to say to capture the attention of the students, ideas should be expressed in sequence, distractions should be avoided, personal listening goals should be determined for and by students and definite goals in the curriculum need to stress positive listening. In addition, Edigar lists criteria as a framework for determining learner progress in listening. Among this list is that students will be able to evaluate stories read, weigh the quality of an oral message or performance, and take pleasure in the content of stories, poems, and dramatizations when heard. Reading aloud and storytelling are two techniques that allow students the opportunity to show their listening behaviors and responses.

## Reading Aloud

Reading Aloud is when the teacher reads aloud to the whole class or small groups. A carefully selected body of children's literature is used, containing a variety of genres. The recommendation to read aloud in the classroom extends from elementary to high school classes. Students of all ages can benefit from listening to a teacher or parent read aloud to them.

In his thesis, 1993 graduate student, Andrew Templeman found that 86% of teachers that were questioned in his study read aloud to their students on a daily basis. Reading aloud for enjoyment was the primary purpose of 58% of teachers. 33% of teachers read aloud to encourage appreciation of literature and 32% of teachers ranked developing skills such as vocabulary and listening as their top reason to read aloud.

## How Reading Aloud Assists the Learning Process

“Reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in young children’s success in learning to read. Additionally, reading aloud improves listening skills... “(Routman, 1994). Much research has been done that supports reading aloud as a valued piece of a balanced reading program and contributes greatly toward student success in school (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Reading aloud to children expands their knowledge of the world around them and provides an opportunity for many children to hear stories that they would be unable to read on their own (Arbuthnot, 1964; Minderman, 1990).

In addition, research has indicated that reading aloud can improve reading achievement. First of all, children become acquainted with patterns of language (Chomsky, 1972) and this may improve good oral reading skills such as fluency. Secondly, the relationship that develops between the listener and the partner who shares the book is motivating to a young learner.

## Storytelling

“Lewis Carroll once called stories love gifts” (Baker & Greene, 1977, p.17). Therefore, telling a story is giving a gift. The definition of storytelling used for this study is: the entire context of a moment when oral narration of stories in verse and/or prose, is performed or led by one person before a live audience; the narration may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictorial, and/or other accompaniment, and may be learned from oral, printed or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that of entertainment or delight and it must have at least a small element of spontaneity in the performance (Pellowski, 1990).

Storytelling is an oral art form that provides a means of preserving and transmitting ideas, images, motives, and emotions that are universal (Cassady, 1990). It is a way of keeping alive the cultural heritage of a people. The art of storytelling has had a rebirth in recent years. Workshops on storytelling and performing stories have expanded throughout the United States. Interest in storytelling courses has increased and traveling librarian-storytellers are returning to “folkness” (Baker & Greene, 1977).

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his 1976 book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, contends that fairy tales help children cope with the psychological problems of growing up (Baker & Greene, 1977). Storytelling promotes high ideals, assists to reduce childhood tensions, entertains, assists the learning process and improves communicative ability.

According to Shedlock (1951), it (storytelling) is a natural and worth-while way of introducing children to literature. She believes that storytelling not only brings dramatic joy to the listener but also develops the imagination. This recognition has encouraged the practice of storytelling by both parents and educators.

#### Storytelling and reading aloud: The contemporary approach

Storytelling, by its definition, is a listening, language experience. However, our eye-minded society has forgotten the power of the spoken word and emphasizes the visual. Many contemporary storytellers, in an effort to compete successfully with television and the visual arts, have turned away from the oral

tradition, with the result that storytelling, particularly for younger children, is often limited to the sharing of picture books.

Reading aloud, also referred to as story reading, is when the teacher reads from a printed story and the children listen. When sharing from a book, two subtle but powerful messages are being sent: that books contain great stories, and if students enjoyed this story then perhaps they should consider looking for more in their school or community library. Despite the tremendous benefits of reading aloud, is there a desirable preference to telling a story without the book?

#### Storytelling's distinct characteristics: A return to original story form

While there is little doubt about the value of reading to children, educators should be aware of the numerous benefits of storytelling that are not necessarily replaced by story reading. "In reading aloud, a book separates you from your audience; in storytelling, however, the teller, unhampered by the necessity of reading from a book, is able to communicate with listeners by using both eyes and lips" (Baker & Greene, 1977, p. 74). Many

professional storytellers agree that there is a clear distinction between storytelling and reading aloud (Cooper, 1989).

Stories can be made in many ways. Paintings, sculpture, and dance can tell stories. Music, plays, movies, TV, and mime all provide a means for presenting storied information. Although these forms can tell stories, each of them is different from storytelling.

The distinguishing features of storytelling have to do with the relationship between the story, the teller, and the audience during the telling. (Livo & Reitz, 1986) Many storytellers do not recognize the media as a storyteller, not because of the innovations, but because of the loss of direct human-to-human interaction. Good storytelling can be powerful, transporting, and magical, and most tellers agree that this can only fully happen in live performance.

Livo and Rietz (1986) agree, "Because the told story is an oral encoding of an oral literature, storytelling is neither story reading nor the recitation of written literature" (p. 19). In addition, with a storyteller's individual interpretation permitted, learning a story no longer requires laborious word-for-word memorization (Farrell & Nessel, 1982). Consequently, the oral tradition of storytelling is returning to the original story form; spoken, not printed.

For this study's purposes, story telling will refer to the act of telling a story orally, without using a book.

### How Storytelling Assists the Learning Process

"Good storytelling makes education an entertaining experience and entertainment an educational experience" (Hearne, 1998). Learning comes with playing, which is—come to think of it—what stories are all about (Hearne, 1998). Anne Shimojima, author of "Storytelling in the School Library Media Center," believes that everyone loves a good story, and stories are the perfect vehicles for teaching and learning. She believes storytelling is an art from that nurtures the spirit. It deepens the relationship between teacher and students, enhances imagination and visualization, introduces children to literature and the beauty of language, enhances reading and writing skills and develops listening skills. These are skills in active listening, an experience where minds must produce images and the child must provide some effort to get the reward of the experience. Students develop concentration and the

ability to follow a sequence. They learn to focus and attend to the world and other cultures that are presented in the stories.

In Pittsburg, California, 1979, an experimental storytelling program was created called the Word Weaving Program.

Catharine Home Farrell, M.L.S. designed the Word Weaving Program to encourage teachers to use, learn, and enjoy the art of storytelling. A workbook for Kindergarten to Grade 3 was created using folk tales, literary tales, adaptations, original, and true stories ranging from easy to more difficult. The workbook included the history, technique and use of storytelling and combined materials and methods.

A study was conducted to investigate the effects of a full-year Word Weaving program. Thirteen experimental subjects were selected at random from the kindergarten and first grade. A control group was made from 13 in kindergarten and third grade. Teachers began to tell stories to their classes and found a new professional ability. Results indicated that although the two groups were equally fluent at first, by the end of the year, the experimental group told longer stories than did earlier and also significantly outperformed the control group. This study produced findings that suggest that storytelling as a method, extrapolates or elongates student thinking.

When asked to tell what happened next, the control children typically responded with "Probably the same thing" or "I don't know—she didn't say." The Word Weaving children, however, typically added new, imaginative ideas to their continuations of the story. The results from the story data suggest that Word Weaving had a positive effect on children's ability to compose new stories based on stories they had heard.

The teachers in this study also suggest that the program benefited the children in ways that the study did not measure. They noted that the frequent story times greatly helped children learn to listen attentively. Informal observation of the groups in this study confirmed that claim. After more than one exposure to the storytelling, the students watched and were eager to repeat dialogue or imitate the teller, while the control classes were noticeably more restless, preoccupied and disinterested. Teachers also unanimously attested to storytelling's benefits on children's oral language development, comprehension, and fundamental understanding of story.

In research by Farrell, the modern storyteller accepts stories as a bona fide educational experience (Williams & Maier, 1981). The art of storytelling can be an enjoyable tool for practicing both

listening skills and verbal expression. For example, new vocabulary can be introduced and easily comprehended within a story's context. However, despite this support, Williams & Maier (1981) reported, "there is little documented evidence that storytelling, no matter how inviting to the child, has any particular effort or education value. It is unusual to find a regular classroom teacher well versed and experienced in the art of storytelling" (p. 3).

## Experimental Variables

Researchers suggest that storytelling encourages the art of listening (Baker & Greene, 1977; Cassady, 1990) and brings to the listeners heightened awareness (Baker & Greene, 1977). However, there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of the presentation. The choice of an age-appropriate story, the preparation of the story, the mode of presentation, and dramatics integrate together to produce listening results.

How can a storyteller tell if the children are enjoying the story? Faces may express interest, curiosity, and delight. On the other hand, some may listen quietly with little or no expression. Some literature reports that a deep sigh or faraway look often means that you have reached the child and although some children do not seem to be paying attention at all, these same children may request that you repeat the tale.

## CHAPTER III

### Design of the Study

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of storytelling and reading aloud on fifth grade students' listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting cognitive and affective processes of listeners and how it may be influencing the classroom environment.

#### Research Questions

1. What differences will I observe in the students' behaviors during the two presentations?
2. What differences will I observe in the environment and in the dynamic between the language sender and receiver (person speaking and persons listening)?
3. What will students self-report on their experiences?

## Methodology

### Subjects

The subjects in this study make up two different fifth grade classrooms. One classroom had 23 students present, the other had 24 students present. They attend the same public suburban school in western New York State. The students had no formal instruction through storytelling within the 1999-2000 school year, prior to the storytelling experience of this study.

### Materials

-T-chart Observation forms for each of four presentations

-Short form questionnaires

Class A: Follows Storytelling

Class A: Follows Read Aloud

Class B: Follows Read Aloud

Class B: Follows Storytelling

-Long form questionnaire (same for both classes)

-Story for Storytelling: "The Wooden Sword"

A folktale from Afghanistan. One of many versions found in Wisdom Tales from Around the World, retold by Heather Forest.

-Story for Read Aloud: "The Man and the Bird"

Kantor, S. (Eds.). (1998). The man and the bird.

One Hundred and One African-American Read-Aloud

Stories. New York: Black Dog and Leventhal.

### Involved Persons

-Professional Storyteller Leah Ruekburg

Leroy, New York

-Observer (researcher)

### Procedure & Story Selection Rationale

The variable in this study was the technique used in presenting, therefore, great caution went into choosing a story and countering the order of presentations as well. For example, class A was told the storytelling first, while class B was told the read aloud first. This would balance out the fact that a guest speaker may have excited the subjects to the extent that it could have skewed the results.

Because choosing the right story is a variable in the effectiveness of either presentation style, storytelling or reading aloud, careful consideration was given to selecting the two stories. The stories were age-appropriate to fifth graders. The storyteller

had previous experience telling the "The Wooden Sword" and thus, used her judgment in deciding it would be appropriate for fifth grade.

The theme of the stories also needed to be somewhat similar. Both stories used a man as the main character. Both men were poor and worked hard for their living. Both were involved with a personal conflict that would lead them to make choices. Both men were in contact with something of greater power and wisdom. Both would sink farther in their troubles before they would rise up. The type of tale was also similar. Both stories are folktales and were approximately ten minutes long to present.

#### TO BEGIN THE PROCEDURE

Because the immediate, uninfluenced responses of the subjects were wanted in the results of this study, the introduction to the proceedings were vocalized by the researcher to the subjects. The following passage is what the researcher said to the classes.

"I am working on a project and today I need your help. Today you will see and hear two presentations. They can be called presentation A and presentation B. After each presentation I will ask you to answer some questions like a survey. Please be honest

with your responses. I will answer any questions you have after the presentations and surveys are over. O.K. Let's get started. I'd like to introduce our presenter, Mrs. Ruekberg."

### Procedures

Order of Events:

Read the table from left to right.

KEY:

SHQ1: The first short  
questionnaire

SHQ2: The second short  
questionnaire

LQ: The long  
questionnaire

Class A	Storytelling of "The Wooden Sword"	SHQ1.	Read Aloud of "The Man and the Bird"	SHQ2./LQ
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Class B	Read Aloud of "The Man and the Bird"	SHQ1	Storytelling of "The Wooden Sword"	SHQ2/LQ
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Both classes were presented with one storytelling and one read aloud, therefore two presentations by the same professional storyteller. There were two main differences in the presentations. The order of the technique was reversed for the two classes, so as to weaken the variable of excitement and curiosity in having a guest

speaker which could influence student comments for the initial greeting and presentation. Secondly, class A sat on an area rug and class B stayed in their desks, which directly corresponded to their most usual room environment and self orientation for daily instruction.

First, class A was directed to the large area rug and was presented with the storytelling of "The Wooden Sword." Immediately following, the subjects were asked to answer two questions about their classroom environment (see Research Question #2) and then could work on an ongoing classroom assignment. During this time, the storyteller traveled across the hallway to another fifth grade class. She presented class B with a read aloud called "The Man and the Bird." Likewise, the subjects were asked to answer two questions.

The storyteller then returned to present the read aloud of "The Man and the Bird" to class A. The class was situated on the rug again. Afterwards, they were given the last short questionnaire (see Research Question #2) and the long form questionnaire (see Research Question #3). These questions were open ended, unbiased and would not lead the participant.

The storyteller proceeded to return to class B for her final presentation, the storytelling of "The Wooden Sword." Class B completed the second short questionnaire and long form questionnaire.

In each presentation, the researcher carefully observed the whole groups and each subject individually as well. Observations were recorded for what the group looked like and sounded like until each story was finished being told. Seeing that each story was approximately seven minutes long to present, the researcher also noted time intervals with behaviors for analysis of long-lasting interest.

### Analysis of Data

Notes were taken during the presentations on the behaviors that students exhibit. Student questionnaires were collected and analyzed for common responses. The researcher looked for correlation between overt interest and active listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique.

Each piece of data collected was designed to provide responses to the research questions.

### **Research Question 1: Student Behaviors**

- Task objective: To observe what students are doing collectively and individually while the presentation is going on.
- Indicate their facial expressions, body language, and verbalizing as active listening signs, passive listening signs, distractions, and interruptions.

### **Research Question 2: Differences in the Environment**

- Task objective: Researcher will observe the environment.
- Task objective: Students will write what they perceived the environment to be like.

### **Research Question 3: Self-Report and preferences**

- Task objective: Students will complete a questionnaire that reports their visual imagery, comprehension, preference, rating and how they feel about their experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### Analysis of Data

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of storytelling and reading aloud on fifth grade students' listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting cognitive and affective processes of listeners and how it may be influencing the classroom environment.

#### Findings and Interpretations

Student questionnaires were collected and analyzed for common responses. The researcher looked for correlation between overt interest and active listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique.

## Question 1

### Student Behaviors

The observations of student behaviors during all presentations were recorded in a T-chart with the headings of “looks like” and “sounds like.” These headings described the students and atmosphere at this time. After the storyteller was introduced, she invited the students to sit where they would feel most comfortable. Most of the students in Class A sat on the rug. Class B remained in their desk seats, where they commonly sat for all activities. The classes sat this way for both of their presentations.

### Student Behaviors during storytelling

In the initial minutes that Mrs. Ruekberg was in front of the either class, most students had their eyes directly on her, while one or two were looking at me. Within two minutes time they were all staring at her, watching her hands move to words of the story. The room was very still and quiet for the entire length of the story. Some girls rocked back and forth while they listened, while others were still. Some held their head in the hands. Eyebrows raised on

some foreheads and dropped down on others. Some of those students looked at me as if they were thinking, "Did you hear that?" The look on the students' faces was intent and obviously curious. At about five minutes into the story, one student gazed out the window and then looked up at the storyteller. One student laughed slightly at a proclamation in the story, and another picked his head straight up, then down, then up again. Even some of the most distractible students kept silent and still for the story, only once looking elsewhere and then back again to the storyteller. One student smiled every time a familiar and meaningful phrase was repeated in the story. Some students began stretching and squirming at ten minutes in the story, as if they could tell the end was nearing, but the words pulled them back to finish it together with the teller. At the end there was a little more movement of hands and feet. One student said, "That's a good story. Let's hear another one." They all clapped.

## Student Behaviors during Read Aloud

While the observations for the storytelling were so similar between the classes that they could be reported together, the observations for the read aloud will be reported separately. They also had many similarities, however it is interesting to note that the order of the presentations were reversed for the classes and therefore, some conclusions can be drawn.

Class B heard the read aloud story by Mrs. Ruekberg before they heard the storytelling. Everyone sat in his/her desk, looking at her. One student's eyes were wide open and her jaw slightly dropped. Some held their heads in their hands. A few minutes into it, one student looked at his arm quickly, started stretching and looked around. Another got up for a drink of water from the fountain in the back of the room and another followed him. Another looked at me. One sat erasing desk marks, but looked up frequently. The room was quiet and stayed silent for the story. At the end of the story, the students looked at me as if to recognize the ending. They started moving quietly and began to clap softly and hesitantly.

Class A heard the read aloud story after they had heard their storytelling. Again, they retreated to the rug. Some of the students

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were whispering, "another story." Mrs. Ruekberg held the printed story in her hands this time. Immediately when she started, some students were not watching her, as demonstrated by their constant head movements down, up and backwards. There was slightly more movement than in the previous presentation. Although the room was quiet, the girls continued to look around at each other. Many faces were looking down instead of at Mrs. Ruekberg. One yawned. The boys were very quiet. One girl was playing with her shoelace. Another was biting her fingernails. One student sat in a different spot on the rug this time and kept his eyes on her most of the time. Three girls sat playing with their hands, shirt and jeans. One student sat looking at me. Overall, the girls showed much more movement but were silent through it. At about six minutes into the story, one student commented, "I think I know what's going to happen." At the end of the story, the students clapped.

#### Class A Verbal Review

After the presentations were over, students from class A verbalized some of their thoughts and reactions. The overwhelming majority felt that storytelling, compared to reading aloud, is presented *with* more enthusiasm. They said that the stories are

easier to picture in your head and you can learn better. One commented that the story is from the speaker's head so she must really care about what she's telling us. Another said that storytelling is better to understand and has more detail. One student said, "I like storytelling better because there are words that you may not understand in books or being read aloud, but in storytelling you can understand."

## Question 2

### Student short form Questionnaire Responses

Fun. Interesting. Astonishment. Amazement. Imagination. These words repeatedly appeared in student responses as they described their classroom after the storytelling presentation. Reading aloud earned its share of favorable comments as well. One student considered his classroom to be "more happier" and "great full" after the read aloud compared to "sad" and "slowed down" on a daily basis. His classmate described the room to be "a room full of imagination" and on a daily basis, a "learning and concentration" room.

Four subjects' responses below describe their classroom environment during the presentations and on a daily basis. They may be read from left to right. Each group of three quotes read across were written by the same individual.

What words would you use to describe your classroom...

after Read Aloud?	on a daily basis?	after Storytelling?
"a story room"	"a work room"	"I describe it as a kingdom."
"An imaginative place. A place to hear stories and imagine them."	"A learning place, with the sounds of pencils writing and papers being passed out."	"A place of royalty after the story. You could imagine the palace as your classroom."
"wakened up, not tired, excited about the story"	"tired, not interested"	"Interested, excited, woken up"
"The room needs more African folk tales, more cheerful and happy"	"I would say it's a nice classroom."	"That it looks happier."

Overall, student responses were tallied under themes that emerged. The subjects in both classes described the storytelling environment as mostly quiet, cheerful, outstanding and interesting. Kind, peaceful, calm, curious, and fun were repeatedly mentioned. Students noted their good listening and paying attention. The

words “amazed” and “enlightened” came across a couple of student answers.

They described the read aloud environment similarly to the storytelling environment, with most comments being that the room was quiet, nice, happy and good.

On the classroom’s daily environment and atmosphere, the majority of comments included sometimes quiet and sometimes noisy, well-behaved, and not listening or paying attention well.

### Question 3

#### Student Long form Questionnaire Responses

With the long form questionnaires, student responses were tallied under themes that emerged. The categories that emerged from student responses to the question, “What were you thinking of during today’s storytelling presentation?” were emotional reviews, characters and plot, abstract ideas about what the story meant, critiques, prediction, imagery, listening goals/self, external questions about the teller and/or story, putting oneself into the story, putting oneself in the story in place of another character, and values.

Emotional review, critique, abstractions, and character and plot comprehension were the most common categories. One student wrote, "I felt enlightened!" Another, "I was thinking that it was fun," and another wrote "I wasn't thinking. I was making pictures in my head."

To question b. and c., "How did you feel during the telling of the story?" most students responded happy, calm/relaxed, quiet, interested and amazed. Other responses were each composed of one or two individuals who commented about feeling fortunate, about giving full attention (as if looking at pictures), being surprised, feeling good and excited, enjoying the presentation, predicting the plot, being in the story, feeling free to think what he/she wanted about the story, thinking as a character, thinking about the characters and thinking about the truth to the story. Students responded that they felt that way because of how the story was told, that it was relaxing to sit quietly and listen, because of the details, because the story was good, so he/she felt good, because of the interesting parts, the title, having a guest speaker, the good meaning and true moral of the story, the expressions, and that it was calming. Some said it sounded real to them. One wrote, "I felt like it was really happening."

Students most often commented about the characters actions. It was also interesting to note that one student felt positively about the experience because he/she didn't have to answer questions or didn't stop listening at all. Another said that it was a good story and made me take my mind off things. Another liked the way the story ended because the poor guy was always hopeful. One student felt "fortunate" during the story because "other people don't have what I have." Still, another was confused by the king's actions and some simply didn't know why that felt the way they did.

For questions d-f, most students rated the storyteller as a perfect 10 because of how she expressed with feeling, enthusiasm, movement, clarity and the power to make the story come alive. One student wrote, "I felt like I was really in it (the story)...because of the words she used and the way she moved to the story."

Many were impressed that she memorized the story. A total of 33 students rated the story a perfect 10 because of the picture it created in their minds, that it was fun, great, new, thrilling, had great details, was wonderful and had lots of imagination in it. They were very impressed that the man didn't lose faith in the story. Only two students referred to the read aloud story in their rating and gave it a

9 and 8. The lowest rating was six, given by two subjects who thought the stories could have been more realistic.

The entire presentation was ranked a 10 by 36 subjects. One wrote "10, because it really paints pictures in my mind and lets me be creative." Many wrote that it deserved the rating because it was fun, new and fascinating! Some wrote that you can really see what's going on in your head. An interesting perspective was found in the student response, "10, because it gave us a break from working." One little girl wrote, "It was the best story I have ever heard."

In response to questions g. and h., only 7 students focused on the read aloud story to explain the events and main idea. Thirty-five focused on the storytelling and all but one student explained the main idea clearly and correctly. One student, and many others, wrote what she thought to be the main idea of the story; "To make us have hope for our self and the future." This message was released in both stories, however more explicitly delivered in the storytelling through the words and actions of the main character.

In question i. students were asked to fill in dialogue bubbles with something about their experience. Most students wrote a short personal critique about the presentation, such as it was awesome.

One wrote in the first bubble, "It was wonderful, great and super."

And in the next small bubble, he wrote, "x 1000."

Another student used his bubble to tell that "It was a very good book (story) and it highered my self-esteem."

The next category that emerged was comments about the characters and plot, then came comments about student behavior, such as the quiet, intent nature of the room. Other comments were about the teller, that the story taught them something and that the storytelling presentation was better than the read aloud presentation. One wrote in the bubble, "Well, my experience today was I teached kids and the kids paid attention the first time."

Questions l. and m. asked the students to draw something memorable from the story and explain why they thought it looked that way. A total of 34 students drew pictures from the storytelling story and 9 drew pictures from the read aloud story. Although many pictures were lacking in details, the students did draw the significant settings, characters and scenes from the stories. The students did not spend much time drawing, and therefore, this may have affected their artistic rendering of what they recalled, but it was obvious which story they drew about and that the pictures from either story,

although nonexistent in the presentations, where quite similarly imagined in the students' minds.

Students answered j. and k. by writing their preference of presentation technique. Thirty-eight responded that they preferred storytelling to reading aloud and 6 preferred the read aloud. Comments include, "Storytelling, because it is easier for me to paint a picture in my mind."

"I would say storytelling because it creates a better image in your head."

"I prefer storytelling because you can actually see what's going on in the story." (An interesting comment because there were no visuals given.)

In response to having another presentation given by a guest speaker, 26 voted for storytelling, 9 favored read aloud and 8 wrote either. Comments include "If I was a teacher for a day I would ask a guest speaker to do a storytelling because so that my students could learn a lesson."

"Yes, because it would teach my class more."

"I would say storytelling because like I said it creates a better image and the storyteller can look at the kids and they can look at her instead of her look down and up every time."

“Storytelling. Class would be more anxious.”

“...also, the students would listen.”

“A storytelling because they might understand more.”

“Storytelling because you need to work your mind to remember things.”

For those students who chose read aloud, some comments were, “I would do read aloud because I probably couldn’t remember all the words.” However, this same student did prefer storytelling to read aloud.

“Read aloud for the class because they will be more used to me.”

“Read aloud because read alouds are fun.”

“I would do a read aloud because it saves more time.”

## Chapter V

### Conclusion and Implications

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of storytelling and reading aloud on fifth grade students' listening behaviors and preference of presentation technique. In this way it can be discovered how storytelling may be affecting cognitive and affective processes of listeners and how it may be influencing the classroom environment.

#### Conclusion

This study investigated how students listened to a storytelling presentation and a read aloud presentation. Students were actively involved in listening for the entire duration of the stories and gave many indications that they listened intently. The students were able to draw pictures of scenes from the story and put into words their feelings on the presentation, the presenter and the story, hence reflecting on their experience. It was exciting to find that some students connected this storytelling experience to

their ability to learn more effectively through story. Furthermore, the students recommended storytelling as a way to learn.

Given a choice of preference between them, storytelling was predominantly favored. The students were able to clearly elaborate on why they favored storytelling and described the classroom environment in the same way as the researcher observed it.

It was interesting to discover that the perception of the environment was positive in both techniques, however storytelling created an atmosphere in which students felt relaxed enough to go beyond a "story room" to a classroom kingdom, where they imagined the setting of the story and felt the characters' feelings.

It is a caregiver and teacher's hope that children learn values of human empathy, sympathy, honesty and faith, just to name a few. By connecting emotionally to the material presented through oral storytelling, students grow cognitively and emotionally.

## Implications for Further Research

Some of the comments were very interesting and should be considered as a seed for further research and development. For example, more than one student felt as if they were not doing any work while listening to the stories. If this is typically the case, further research could focus on the difference of achievement, given a perception, or actuality, of how much work one is doing.

Considering relevant questions, research can be conducted to investigate if the behaviors demonstrated during storytelling, such as active listening, would be carried over into other lessons with traditional or nontraditional teaching techniques. Would student-led discussions have greater success if the students developed and used listening skills that are acquired through frequent storytelling lessons? Speaking of lessons, how could storytelling be used to translate the concepts of other curriculum subjects such as math, social studies, or science? For example, a teacher's presentation through story could be used to increase comprehension and recall of historical events and people. It can also facilitate the translation of emotions through time and place which otherwise would most

often be discovered through oral accounts that have been written down.

### Implications for the Classroom

Current studies have taught us much about how we use language. We use it constructively, actively, interactively, strategically and fluently. We know that for learning to occur students' use of language must be both motivated and integrated. Stories integrate thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are comprised of human character, human values and human speech, which all come out in the literature. Values of community, individual interests and natural curiosity are actively pursued by the learner.

The act of storytelling in the classroom has gained recognition not only from storytellers, but students continuously applaud the effort on the spot as well. The pleasure found in listening to a story is an important reason to actively listen and retain the exchange of information. In addition, storytelling acts a catalyst for significant changes in the learning environment and

motivation of all students. This provides us with serious implications of how educators can teach more effectively. Teachers should be trained in the fundamental techniques of storytellers because students respond to a storytelling presentation. Consequently, they comprehend and retain information better and connect it to their lives. In addition, they emotionally prefer it. Many teachers use lecture speaking where even though there is discussion, the majority of talking is done by the teacher. If we are to improve student listening and engage students in learning at the same time, good storytelling can do that. Many teachers are not willing to give up their "right" to speak or their control of the conversation. Perhaps transitions need to come first with teacher accountability for public speaking skills. Storytellers use public speaking skills that teachers can learn and begin using. The results include captivating an audience. Attentive listening is second nature because listening is what the audience wants to do and this has been motivated and encouraged by the techniques of the teller. Furthermore, if teachers improve their speaking skills by implementing research on how storytelling influences student achievement, the outcomes should include increased student listening, comprehension, social and emotional connections,

motivation, performance and willingness to engage. Objectives can be met and people enjoy their time, which I find to be a lost prized-possession right now. Not only do people complain that there is no time, and that children waste time, but adults are not enjoying what they are doing in their time. We always look for the time after, when we can do the things that we enjoy, that bring out the best in us or we feel are worthy of our precious time (theater, movies, sports, drama). We look for this after our work days. Why do we not bring this valued, enjoyable time into our school days? I for one would like to start this by seeing more teachers aware of storytelling techniques.

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APPENDIX A

**Class A: Student Behaviors during Storytelling**

Looks like

Sounds like

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APPENDIX B

**Class A: Student Behaviors during Read Aloud**

Looks like

Sounds like

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APPENDIX C

**Class B: Student Behaviors during Storytelling**

Looks like

Sounds like

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APPENDIX D

**Class B: Student Behaviors during Read Aloud**

Looks like

Sounds like

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## APPENDIX E

**Class A: Question 2. Follows Storytelling.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What words would you use to describe your classroom during today's presentation?

What words would you use to describe your classroom on a daily basis?

**Class A: Question 2. Follows Read Aloud.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What words would you use to describe your classroom during today's second presentation ?

## APPENDIX F

**Class B: Question 2. Follows Read Aloud.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What words would you use to describe your classroom after today's presentation?

What words would you use to describe your classroom on a daily basis?

**Class B: Question 2. Follows Storytelling.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What words would you use to describe your classroom after today's second presentation?







k. If you were the teacher for the day, would you ask a guest speaker to do a storytelling or a read aloud for your class? Why?

l. Draw a picture of something memorable from the story.

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