

THE EFFECTS OF STORY RETELLING
ON KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN'S
LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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 of Science in Education

by

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August, 1988

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Abstract

Nineteen kindergarten children from a rural school participated in a story retelling treatment program. The program was designed to determine if story retelling was effective in increasing the listening comprehension scores of the participants. Eighteen students served as a control group.

Materials included The California Achievement Test Level 10 Form E for the pretest and the posttest. The comprehension subtest of the CAT was administered to examine the students' abilities in listening comprehension.

For a period of three weeks, students in the treatment group had twelve stories read aloud to them. Following eight of the read aloud sessions the children had the opportunity to retell the story they heard to a partner. In the other four sessions the researcher modeled the retelling task. The control group heard the same twelve stories without any post-listening activities.

Results from a series of t tests indicated that giving children the opportunity to retell stories had a positive effect on their listening comprehension.

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Chapter I

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of story retelling on kindergarten children's listening comprehension. Kindergarten students were given the opportunity to retell stories which they had heard read to them.

Need for the Study

Current research in improving children's comprehension indicates that reading strategies can be taught during read-aloud sessions with kindergarten age children. One such strategy is story retelling. A survey conducted by Morrow (1982) revealed that children in nursery school and kindergarten classes are given little time to discuss stories read to them. Morrow (1986) stated that retelling appeared to have potential for skill development. But, it has not been widely tested.

Numerous studies reviewed by Pearson and Fielding (1982) indicated "that elementary children who received direct training in listening could indeed improve in listening comprehension" (p. 619). Keislar and Stern (1969) held that combining listening with oral responses from the listeners enhanced listening

comprehension. Further research is needed to determine the validity of story retelling as a strategy effective in increasing the listening comprehension of students.

Definition of Terms

Story Retelling: A postlistening reconstruction of a story.

Strategy: A systematic, goal-directed behavior that can be generalized beyond the immediate task.

Listening Comprehension: The understanding of material heard, with respect to the listener's grasp of the meaning of words and phrases and sentences.

Story Structure: The setting, theme, plot and resolution of stories.

Summary

Kindergarten students were given the opportunity to retell stories they had heard read to them. Surveys conducted have found that children in nursery school and kindergarten classes are given little time to discuss stories that have been read to them.

Research indicated that story retelling appeared to have potential for skill development.

This study examined how giving children the opportunity to retell stories affected their listening comprehension.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine what the effectiveness of having kindergarten children retell stories was on their listening comprehension.

The research related to this study focused on how story retelling may affect listening comprehension and the importance of instructing children about a story's structure using story retelling.

Pearson and Johnson (1978) explained that good listening comprehension instruction should precede good reading comprehension instruction. Children should be given the opportunity to construct a model of meaning for a text or story after hearing it. Pearson and Johnson suggested that children can learn to predict, summarize, retell and discuss things after hearing a story.

Pearson and Fielding (1982) in their review of the literature on listening comprehension concluded that listening comprehension is enhanced by various kinds of active verbal responses on the part of students during and after listening. Pearson and Fielding further suggested that teaching listening

strategies appeared to help children become more conscious of their listening habits. Activities involving verbal responses and interaction, such as retelling stories, seemed to improve listening comprehension. Because elementary school students spend much time listening, Pearson and Fielding suggested that more attention should be paid to "listening comprehension as an entity in its own right" (p. 626).

Keislar and Stern (1969) combined listening with oral responses from the listeners in a series of studies. They reported that the approach aided the listening comprehension of kindergarten children.

Allison (1971) found that fifth grade students achieved higher listening scores when given the opportunity to discuss listening lessons, in small groups, with their peers. Other groups in the study received either no listening instruction or listening instruction with no reinforcement.

Weidner (1976) found gains in fourth grade students' listening comprehension scores when a teacher read literature to them for ten minutes a day. Dennis (1987) reported that the listening scores of first grade students increased after listening to stories read aloud for fifteen minutes a day during a six week study.

Crowell and Au (1979) stated that if training in listening comprehension is to be of benefit, it must help the child become an active processor of story information. The investigators held that teachers should ask questions about the content of a story read. The comprehension questions should be ordered in terms of level of difficulty. Thus a child's thinking could be guided through several levels of comprehension by the sequence of questions asked.

Morrow (1986) defined story retelling as a post-reading of listening recall in which children tell what they remember from their reading or listening. Morrow stated that story retelling provides children with active participation in a literary experience through the use of oral language. Listening comprehension seems to be improved by active participation on the part of the listener. Retelling is a strategy which employs active participation after listening. Morrow held that story retelling appeared to have potential for skill development but had not been widely tested. It is possible that story retelling could affect children's listening comprehension scores. Morrow found story retelling to be an instructional strategy capable of improving children's dictation of original stories and oral language complexity.

The eighty two children in Morrow's (1986) study heard the same eight picture storybooks. The children in the experimental group were asked to retell the stories they heard on a one to one basis to an investigator. The children in the control group were asked to draw a picture about the stories they heard. Both groups listened to the stories in the following format; a brief pre- and post-reading discussion, the title was given, pictures were shown and after reading the story, the investigator allowed two responses to be given about the part of the story that was liked best. Results showed significant improvement of the experimental group over the control group in story dictation. Morrow concluded that "retelling proved to be an instructional strategy capable of improving children's dictations of original stories and oral language complexity within those stories" (p.135).

Campbell and Campbell (1976) found that when prekindergarten children heard a story told by a person present rather than via tape recorder their retellings of the story contained more correct themes and words from the story.

Zimilies and Kuhns (1976) reported that retelling improved story comprehension in six to eight

year olds who were asked to retell a story after it was read to them. There was indication from the posttests that retelling stories shortly after listening to them facilitated recall.

Blank and Sheldon (1971) found that semantic recall and syntactic complexity in the language of four to six year olds were enhanced when children were asked to repeat sentences in a story during story reading.

Morrow (1985) found that total comprehension scores were increased when children retold a story they had heard just once. Further investigation by Morrow evoked positive results when she provided children with frequent practice in retelling. Eight stories were read aloud and the children's retellings were guided by an adult who focused on the structural framework of a story. The results showed that the experimental group improved 27.6% in its posttest. The control group improved 9.3% in its posttest. The comprehension test scores revealed that the experimental group was 11.5% better than the control group on the posttest. The results indicated that "the improved scores in the study were due to the frequent practice and guidance in retelling" (p.657). There were improvements

in both structural questions and traditional (literal, interpretive, and critical) questions even though in the study only structural elements of the stories were stressed.

Gambrell, Pfeiffer and Wilson (1985) investigated the effects of retelling upon the comprehension and recall of text information for fourth grade students. The researchers' results suggested that "retelling has direct, beneficial consequences for children's processing of subsequent text" (p.216). Gambrell et al. (1985) further explained that having children engage in retelling what they have read is an activity that reflects a holistic concept of reading comprehension as opposed to the "piecemeal approach" of traditional type of teacher questioning.

The past decade has marked an acceleration in the use of retellings for assessment purposes as well as for research studies. Numerous researchers (Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975; Stein and Glenn, 1975; Thorndyke, 1977) as cited in Morrow (1986) have used story retelling when describing story grammars and structures and when investigating the comprehension of stories. According to these

investigators, stories should include a setting, a theme, episodes and a resolution. Children and adults alike have certain expectations about how a story should go. These expectations about a story's structure are called story grammars.

Applebee (1978) believed that school aged children do have some schema for story structure. Guthrie (1977) advised that teachers should recognize the ability of six year olds to search for and use abstract story structure as a basis for comprehension and memory of a story.

Whaley (1981) reported that one way to advance children's comprehension was to enhance the development of their knowledge of story components. According to Whaley allowing students to retell simple stories may develop or heighten their awareness of story structures. He also explained that providing children with opportunities to experience stories may enhance their knowledge of story structures. He stated "reading to them regularly is one way to provide this experience" (p.768). The same study suggested that individuals at different ages have highly similar concepts of what constitutes a story. In conclusion Whaley stated that "knowledge of story structure appears to facilitate readers' and listeners' comprehension and memory of stories" (p.768).

McConaughy (1980) suggested that younger children, in kindergarten and first grades, could be provided with parts of the story's structure such as the theme and then be asked questions about settings and resolutions. Questions concerning a story "can be tailored to fit the specific components of the different schema children use at different ages" (p. 162).

Carnine and Kinder (1985) used a story grammar to instruct intermediate level students whom were receiving remedial instruction in reading. They were suspected to be poor comprehenders. A twenty to thirty minute training session was employed in which three stories were read. The following questions were used each session; Who is the story about? What does he or she want to do? What happens when he or she tries to do it? What happens in the end? The teacher read the first story and asked the group the questions. Individual students were asked to read the second story aloud. the story grammar questions were asked at appropriate times and student errors were corrected immediately. The third story was read silently. The students were told to ask themselves each question as they read, answering the final question when they finished reading. Students'

comprehension scores significantly increased and maintenance tests showed that the students had integrated this approach into their reading. The students were using the strategy independently.

Research by Morrow (1984) investigated the frequent use of pre and postquestioning on kindergarten children's listening comprehension. Morrow also sought to compare the effectiveness of a strategy employing questioning and discussion focused on the structure of stories with a traditional strategy employing literal, inferential, and critical discussion questions. Results of Morrow's study supported the comprehension development used in the study. The results suggested that the use of story structure strategies, traditional strategies, and the combination of both all contributed to improved test scores. The results indicated that when stories were read to kindergarten children who were in the story structure treatment group, the children significantly improved in performance on structural questions.

Pellegrini and Galda (1982) found that the story comprehension of kindergarten and first grade children was most effectively facilitated when children's concepts of stories were accommodated to peers' story concepts through fantasy play. The

children were made aware of many aspects of the story. They had to accommodate their views to other's views, when engaged in play. Pellegrini and Galda concluded that children in the fantasy play condition recalled most story events and most sequences of events.

Brown (1975) suggested that the active involvement of children in story reconstruction facilitates their comprehension of the story. Reconstruction was defined in Brown's study as children's thinking about individual story events and arranging pictures of the story in sequence. Similarly, Amato and Ziegler (1973) found retelling to be a procedure that enables the child to play a large and active role in reconstructing stories and provides for interaction between the teller and the listener.

Smith (1980) as cited in Irwin and Mitchell (1983) believed that story retellings indicated how the reader created a text for his/her own understanding. Smith stated that story retellings were a fresh way to look at comprehension. Story retelling facilitated a partial understanding of the comprehension process used by a reader or a listener.

Summary

Research seemed to indicate that there were many advantages in giving children the opportunity to retell

stories. Research has suggested that practice and instruction in retelling stories were likely to result in the development of comprehension.

Morrow et al. (1986) summarized that retelling is an instructional procedure that can help teachers move from viewing reading as a set of isolated skills to viewing it as a process of conveying and re-creating meaning.

Retelling has shown the potential to improve and develop comprehension, oral language complexity, and reproduction and production of stories and text. Retelling has also been used as an assessment tool for how children understand stories.

Studies have shown the advantages of having children retell stories they have heard.

Research is limited on how giving children the opportunity to retell stories affects their listening comprehension.

Chapter III

The Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of story retelling on listening comprehension. Kindergarten children were given the opportunity to retell a story they had heard read to them.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were investigated in this study:

1. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest listening scores of the kindergarten control group and the mean pretest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.
2. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest listening scores of the kindergarten control group and the mean posttest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.
3. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest and posttest listening scores of the kindergarten control group.
4. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest and posttest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.

Methodology

Subjects

Thirty seven students from a rural elementary school were the subjects for the investigation. Both groups of students were in self-contained, full day kindergarten classrooms. The researcher was the teacher of the experimental group and a neighboring classroom teacher agreed to participate with her classroom as the control group. The teacher of the control group was aware of the treatment and of her responsibilities.

Nineteen students were placed in a treatment program and eighteen acted as a control group. Students who were absent for either the pretest or posttest or both were excluded from the study.

Instruments

The comprehension subtest of The California Achievement Test Level 10 Form E was the material used for the pretesting and posttesting.

Eight picture story books were selected for the use with the control and treatment group. The books chosen met the following criteria: 24-56 pages in length, appeared in The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease, and had a read-aloud recommendation beginning at toddler, preschool or kindergarten levels.

The books were also similar in that they all have well developed story structure with delineated characters, definite settings, clear themes, plot episodes, and a resolution.

Procedures

Pretesting and posttesting took place in the morning. the researcher administered the tests. The students were tested in their own classrooms.

The study was conducted for a two week period in March. The treatment group was read aloud to four times a week for two weeks and was given the opportunity to retell the stories heard. The same picture story books were read to the control group who did not have the opportunity to retell the stories.

Morrow (1986) indicated in a study of story retelling that prior to reading, the title of the book was named, a few ideas concerning the story were related to the students and during the reading the pictures were shown. The same format was followed in this study.

The treatment group was asked to retell the story they had just heard to a partner. Partners were chosen by the researcher. Teacher judgements and observations were used when choosing partners. Children were paired up because in a peer situation

the researcher felt there would be cooperation and interaction on the part of both partners. They were asked to retell the story as if their partner had never heard it before. Each child was given time to retell the story to his/her partner with alternate first turns for each treatment session. Partners wore tags with the numeral one or two on them, depending on whose turn it was to go first or second. The treatment group was encouraged to tell all that they could remember about the story. The story retelling continued for approximately five minutes.

Following the pretest and in the week previous to the study beginning, the researcher modeled story retelling four times. The researcher felt the need to expose the students to what would be expected of them during the retelling sessions.

The posttest was administered to decide if the treatment group became more proficient in listening as a result of retelling stories they had heard read to them. Students in the control group were also posttested. The results of the pretest and posttest were compared to determine changes in listening comprehension. The students in the control group did not participate in the story retelling program.

Summary

Thirty seven students from a rural school district were administered a pretest in listening comprehension. During a two week period, the treatment group was given the opportunity to retell eight stories they had heard read to them. The control group was not given the opportunity to retell stories during this period. A posttest was given to both groups at the end of two weeks. Results of the pretest and posttest scores were compared to determine change in listening comprehension. A series of t tests was used to analyze the data.

Chapter IV
Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of story retelling on kindergarten children's listening comprehension scores. Kindergarten students were given the opportunity to retell stories which they had heard read to them.

Analysis of the Findings

Mean listening scores were calculated for the control and the treatment group.

The four hypotheses proposed in this study were tested and analyzed using the data obtained from the test scores.

A restatement of hypothesis one is as follows:

1. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest listening scores of the kindergarten control group and the mean pretest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.

A t test for the difference between two independent means was used to compare the mean listening scores of the pretest of the control group and the pretest of the treatment group. A calculated t score of 1.59 was obtained. Since the critical value

of t for thirty five degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is ± 2.0315 and since the t obtained was 1.59, the null hypothesis is retained and it is concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between pretest scores of the control group and the treatment group.

Table 1

t Test of Difference Between Pretests of the Control Group and the Treatment Group

	df	\bar{X}	s.d.	t
Control Group	35	16.17	2.01	1.59
Treatment Group	35	17.42	2.72	1.59

$t_{crit} - 2.031; p \leq .05$

A restatement of hypothesis two is as follows:

2. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest listening scores of the kindergarten control group and the mean posttest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.

A t test for the difference between two independent means was used, comparing the posttest of the control group and the posttest of the treatment group. A calculated t score of .98 was obtained.

Since the critical value of t for thirty five degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is ± 2.0315 and since the t obtained was $.98$, the null hypothesis is retained and it is concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control group. At the time of the posttest only an approximate one half point difference was found between the posttest means.

Table 2

t Test of Difference Between Posttests of the Control Group and the Treatment Group

	df	\bar{X}	s.d.	t
Control Group	35	18.89	1.41	.98
Treatment Group	35	19.42	1.86	.98

$t_{crit} = 2.031; p \leq .05$

A restatement of hypothesis three is as follows:

3. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest and posttest listening scores of the kindergarten control group.

A t test for related measures was used to compare the mean listening scores of the pretest and posttest of the control group. A calculated t score

of 6.33 was obtained. Since the critical vlaue of t for seventeen degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is ± 2.110 and the t obtained was 6.33, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the control group.

Table 3

t Test of Difference Between the Pretest and the Posttest of the Control Group

	df	\bar{X} Pretest	\bar{X} Posttest	t
Control Group	17	16.17	18.89	6.33

$t_{crit} - 2.110; p \leq .05$

A restatement of hypothesis four is as follows:

4. There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean pretest and posttest listening scores of the kindergarten treatment group.

A t test for related measures was used to compare the mean listening scores of the pretest and posttest of the treatment group. A calculated t score of 2.82 was obtained. Since the critical value of t for eighteen degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence

level is ± 2.101 and the t obtained was 2.82, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the treatment group.

Table 4

t Test of Difference Between the Pretest and the Posttest of the Treatment Group

	df	\bar{X} Pretest	\bar{X} Posttest	t
Treatment Group	18	17.42	19.42	2.86

$t_{crit} - 2.101; p \leq .05$

Summary

From the data collected in this study, it was concluded that after giving kindergarten children the opportunity to retell stories there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest of the retelling group. At the same time the data collected indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the control group's pretest and posttest scores. The control group was not given the opportunity to retell stories they had heard read to them.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of story retelling on kindergarten children's listening comprehension.

Conclusions

Two of the four null hypotheses were rejected, leading to the following conclusions about the effectiveness of story retelling on kindergarten children's listening comprehension:

1. Giving kindergarten children the opportunity to retell stories increases their listening comprehension scores.
2. The control group heard the same eight stories as the treatment group. The control group did not have the opportunity to retell the stories, but they did show an increase in their posttest scores.
3. The fact that the control group heard the same stories may account for the increase in the control group's posttest scores.
4. Both groups showed a statistically significant difference between their pretest and posttest scores.

5. There was not a statistically significant difference between the posttest of the control group and the posttest of the treatment group. Both groups showed an increase in their posttest scores.

Implications for Research

Further investigations into story retelling for improving listening comprehension are suggested.

Research into the following areas is needed:

1. Story retelling could be utilized at various age levels to determine when it has maximum success.

2. Research studies on listening comprehension could be designed for all elementary grade levels.

3. Story retelling in classroom reading situations could be investigated for improving children's listening comprehension skills and/or reading comprehension skills.

4. Future studies could develop a more appropriate test instrument.

5. Children's concept of a story, before and after having had an opportunity to retell stories, could be investigated with an appropriate test.

6. A guided story retelling study could be conducted. An investigator could instruct and guide children through the process of story retelling and

then test for improvements in listening comprehension, reading comprehension and in concept of stories.

7. Future studies could include taped stories versus stories read aloud and the differences between the two modes of presentation could be assessed for increases in listening comprehension.

8. Future studies could take into consideration the various ordered levels of listening comprehension that children progress through.

9. Research could concentrate on the story retelling technique for improving the listening comprehension of low achieving children.

10. Longitudinal studies are needed to see if story retelling when done by kindergarten children carries over in the students after they have learned to read for themselves.

For further study, the following changes in the experimental design are recommended:

1. A longer study could be conducted using more books.

2. Children could be given a free choice of partners to retell stories to.

Suggestions for Classroom Practice

1. Story retelling could be considered a useful activity in a classroom program.

2. Teachers should choose books that have been suggested by authorities as good choices.

3. Before reading a story that will be retold by students, the teacher should read the book herself.

4. After a book has been read, the teacher should give children the opportunity to retell the story.

5. Children should be instructed about a story's structure, beginning at the kindergarten level.

6. Children's story retelling should be guided with prompts based on a story's structure.

7. A reader or listener should be given a purpose for their tasks of reading a story or listening to a story.

8. Retelling can provide a strategy for organizing material that is being read or heard.

9. Use the children's retellings as diagnostic or assessment tools for understanding their reading comprehension skills.

Retelling may help teachers move away from the view that reading is a set of isolated skills to a view of reading as a process for conveying and recreating

meaning. Children's story retelling can be encouraged in the classroom.

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