

# Storytelling: learning and growth tool for young children



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Storytelling is a universal tradition, as we know, stories are based on various culture backgrounds, social formation and the thinking pattern of the public, and it is an effective channel to people, no matter young or old, to explain or represent phenomena and activities, emotions and motives. When it comes to young children, storytelling is like a mental journey which needs to be developed in children, it can be full of imagination or according to fact. In Jacqueline Harrett's *Tell Me Another... Speaking, Listening and Learning Through Storytelling*, she states that 'Narrative is central to early learning and thinking across the curriculum and oral storytelling develops the visualisation skills that aid memory and enhance understanding, and encourage the development of speaking and listening skills'.

Good stories are both educational and entertaining. Listening, telling, making-up and discussing about stories can achieve numerous significant targets. For instance, storytelling offers these advantages: stimulate children's language development; encourage children to explore what they are interested in; help children to build confidence; provide the opportunity for children to learn about the world we live in. So why not bring storytelling into children's classrooms?

In this study I will investigate the relationship between storytelling and young children's language learning. And through literature review to get to know what researches have been done and what point of views do the former researchers have. Then I will use questionnaires and interviews to get an initial picture of how teachers use storytelling in their classes, and what is the response of the children.

## **Literature review:**

Base on review of relevant literature, it is undoubted that storytelling plays a essential role in helping children's linguistic, intellectual, emotional and creative development. The finding from the literature are organised around the following themes:

### **The power of storytelling**

Peter Hollindale (1997, p70) claims that 'we construct our selfhood through memory; that we depend for our identity on our sense of personal continuity in time, and that we express this to our selves by storying our lives... we need stories as we need food, and we need stories most of all in childhood as we need food then, in order to grow'.

Storytelling as one of the form of education, it can offer children a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere, help them to understand and remember acknowledge better, besides, storytelling is an effective approach to keep children's interest and attention longer.

### **Story and language enhancement**

For children to be competent in literacy, we need to build their oral language skills in preparation for reading and writing, and storytelling is one way we can choose. Baker and Greene (1977) argue that 'storytelling encourage the art of listening, as a storytelling session presupposes listeners who play an active part in the process'. Nowadays, the important issue is not let children just hear, but to pay attention to listening and thinking.

Listening and reading have share one thing in common, that is, both of them involve the intake of information. Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss found that when children listen to stories they forget the mechanics of reading, they just enjoy the pure pleasurable language. However, they point out that by listening childre can feel what it would like to read fluently, and then they are better prepared to be competent to the role of reader.

" Writing language development draws on competence in oral language, since both written and oral language share underlying structures and since, for most learners, oral language competence reaches a high level earlier. As children become literate, the two system become interactive, and children use each to suport the other when they needs to." (Goodman, 1979, p. 150)

This statement state that there is a link between writing and speaking, in order to extend the capability in literacy children should practice frequently on their oral skills. According to Claire Jennings (1991, p. 73), the reason why storytelling can extend literacy skills is that children are integrating the four modes of language. 'If children are constantly immersed in story through their personal reading, through listening to shared stories, as well as by the wealth of stories which pervade life, then their nation of story develops naturally.' When children are good at telling stories, they can write storues with the standard story components: beginning and end, plot, characters, and theme. In other words, they are able to shape and form their stories. 'Students also develop an awareness of how an audience affects a telling and the awareness is reflected in the students' subsequent writing.' (Martha Hamilton & Mitch Weiss, 2005, p. 19)

## **Teachers' role in storytelling**

Since storytelling is brought into classroom, teachers are play a pivotal role in supporting children's positive responses to stroies. From comprare teachers' support or restriction children's response during storysharing it can help us to recognise how could teachers promote storytelling in their class.

## **Comoarative approaches to teachers' roles during interactions with story-books**

### **Supportive Teacher Role**

### **Limited and Restrictive Teacher Role**

providing regular opportunities for children to choose differenyt stories

demonstrating how stories can be interpreted

allowing children to ask their own questions about stories

allowing children regular opportunities to talk about stories in their own terms including social, culture and congitive insights

encourage children to formulate questions and hypothesise about stories

selecting all the storybooks to be read and discussed

providing no insight into how stories can be handle and read

using questions mainly as a 'test' of what the children knows

dominating interactions with children and paying little attention to their

socio-culture and cognitive learning

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setting the story reading with limited learning opportunities and restricted responses from children

(Adapted from " Contrasting Approaches to Text Tale" Cairney (1990, p. 34)

As teacher, the responsibility is to coach children utilise their own thinking pattern to discover stories' deep meaning, and adopt the appropriate modelling during storytelling. Firstly, allow children choose their favourite stories, and encourage them have their own understanding of the story; Secondly, give children a stage to tell or retell stories, and try to make them receive positive respond and support from their peers, so that they can feel confident and willing to share more stories or understanding; Thirdly, explain how to organise stories including story plot, characters and key events, then encourage children to write their own stories.

After the literacure review, this study will be carry out in a primary school where teachers bring storytelling into their class. What I want to focus on in this assignment is how storytelling play a part in the real classroom, specifically:

How can teachers best develop storytelling in classroom?

How to promote children to be an activity participate during storytelling?

What kind of techniques can be used for storytelling?

Did children realise they can benefit from stories?

## **Research design:**

Researchers have to decide what is going to constitute 'valid' data and which methods are going to be used to collect and analyse it. Kaplan suggests that the target of methodology is to help researchers to comprehend, in the widest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself.'

In order to acquire first hand resources, I will use questionnaire and interview in primary school, the results of this can help me to know that how storytelling be used in real classroom, and what teachers and children's reaction to it.

## **Children questionnaire**

The questionnaire (see appendix) is designed to obtain information from children about how they work with stories. And it mainly consists of choice questions and open questions, to be more specifically:

Before the questions, children need to write down their personal details, boy or girl, and age. There are 11 questions in all which are arranged into seven parts. Firstly, get a general idea about children's attitudes of story. Secondly, find the source of the stories, in other words, where can children hear or read stories, find out whether storytelling is widely used in children's life. Thirdly, type of story that children like and what is the definition of good story in their mind. Fourthly, the question is to focus on children's reactions when they listen to stories. Fifthly, when children take the role of telling or retelling stories, what factors may influence their performance. Sixthly, the question's purpose are to find children's feelings and reactions after the storytelling class

The appearance of the questionnaire is important, especially for children, it should be attractive, the layout need be clear and I will not give them too many questions to answer. And I will give them a clear instructions guide them to finish their questionnaire, for example, " please put a tick on the answer you wish to choose". Besides, the words I use will be clarity and easy to understand. At the end of the questionnaire, there is a reward system, I will give children a gift to thanks for their cooperation.

## **Teacher interview**

Observation research is a effective method to study the relation between storytelling and children. However, consider of obervation need spend much more time and the feasibility of this method in short period, I decide to use teacher interview to help me to gain more detail of the storytelling class.

'Interview is a transaction that take place between seeking information on the part of one and supplying information in the part of the other'(Cohen & Manion, 1980, p307). The purpose of the interview is to explore further information about how teachers use storytelling in their classroom and their opinion on storytelling help children develop literacy ability. I will choose to use the 'less formal interview' in which I have a number of key issues that I will ask, and I may modify or change some of the questions depends on the conversation. The interview questions will be a semi-structured format with predetermined open questions and sub-questions (see appendix). This is intended to give the interviewee a free zone to show their point of views of the issues which they intersted in or willing to say more.



Questionnaire and interview both have their own advantage and disadvantage. For children questionnaire, it can provide different children's feeling of the issues I hope can find out. However, they may feel confused about some questions which they may not have enough experience to answer or realise. When it comes to teacher interview, the consequence is really depend on the teacher's own standpoint and experience, it may different from what I suppose to obtain.

### **Ethical issue**

'Ethical has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair'(Sieber, 1993, p14). Interview should be done carefully, when the teacher state their attitude and opinion, even if them are differ from I am eager to acquire, I need show my respect to them, and could not judging other's thought. At the same time, children and teachers have their right to refuse the questionnaire and interview, and if they would like to cooperate with me, willing to join their force to help me to study using storytelling in classroom that would be very helpful.

### **Data analysis**

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this assignment present that classroom represents a fine locus for storytelling, where children can hear and share stories, and learn from stories with the help of teachers. Storytelling enable children to improve their language skills, at the same time help children develop a knowledge not only their own self but also of other people's cultures and understanding.

Through this essay I hope I can utilise the research methods to prove the benefits of storytelling to children as the literature mentioned. In addition, put questionnaire and interview into practice can obtain an in-depth comprehension of the research methods.