

Chapter 8

Crafting Stories of Voice and Influence: Children's Cognitive and Emotional Engagement in Listening and Telling Stories

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ABSTRACT

The interplay between language, cognition, and the effects of emotions promote language and literacy development. Children have a natural inclination to build on other children's stories, which is the origin of the collective stories of voice and influence discussion. Stories are empowering venues that give children a voice and simultaneously open windows for them to step inside someone else's shoes, make connections, take perspective, and construct meaning. Stories make us human; children become aware of the world around them by listening and sharing stories. This action research project reports the process of children listening to stories and tailoring the telling of a story to a specific audience. Children were cognitively and emotionally engaged in interpreting stories and transmitting their messages through dialogic thinking and boundary objects. The children made their stories visible using a pedagogy of multiliteracies to tell stories in a natural, playful, safe, and engaging way.

INTRODUCTION

Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn. (Benjamin Franklin)

My childhood memories are filled with warm storytelling experiences that emerged from Uncle Victor's (my aunt's husband) oral traditions. Uncle Victor was born and raised in a small agricultural village in Ecuador where the activities end at sunset and the families gather for dinner and storytelling at the light

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of a candle because there was no electricity. Families had no access to children's books in those days but had a rich oral tradition. Heath (1982) refers to oral traditions as ways of making meaning from stories and contents about the real world. My big family, which consisted of my mother, siblings, grandmother, uncle, aunt, and cousins, shared a house at the beach near Uncle Victor's village during the summers. There was still limited electricity access and no distracting electronic devices, of course. We gathered in an open terrace after dinner to hear Uncle Victor, who was a natural bedtime storyteller. He captivated our attention with "The Adventures of Juan De Oso." Every summer marked a new season, and each season had several episodes. We were always eager to hear about Juan de Oso; Uncle Victor had the ability to create suspense. He triggered our imagination with invitations to predict the end of each episode. Uncle Victor gave us ownership and agency by giving us a protagonist role and inviting us to tell the endings. Every episode was so real for us; our contributions to the story were a mix of fantasy and reality. Brown (2018) says that when we have the courage to walk into our story and own it, we get to write the ending, but they own us when we don't own our stories of failure, setbacks, and hurt. Juan de Oso became a family icon. Uncle Victor passed away many years ago, but the Adventures of Juan de Oso are still alive in all of us. We always bring up episodes that caused an impact in our lives at our family gatherings. This story is a testament to the power of oral traditions in fostering language and literacy development. Heath's (1982) ethnographic research found that literacy events, such as "The Adventures of Juan de Oso," reflect the culture that children learn as they grow up.

Stories are powerful tools to cognitively and emotionally engage children in understanding issues of global significance. Children need to develop a strong, solid sense of who they are to develop resilience in a complex and changing world. Listening and telling stories are powerful venues to help children develop self-awareness, which is an important point of reference for interacting with the world. At the same time, children learn to see other perspectives. Stories help teachers listen to children's voices and understand their worlds.

As a literate society, we expect children to become literate to succeed in life. Unfortunately, many programs easily forget the natural conditions that foster language learning, turning literacy programs in artificial, meaningless, and disengaging experiences. This study aims to prove how natural approaches to language and literacy development that cognitively and emotionally engage children are efficient and lifelong lasting. This happens through stories and activities that are meaningful for the lives of the children.

The chapter gives the reader a bird's eye view into storytelling for voice and influence, as a means not only to promote language and literacy development but also to embrace children's right to participate with a voice. It amplifies the roles of nature and nurture, the interplay between language, cognition, and the effects of emotions to promote language and literacy development through storytelling. It discusses the benefits of listening to stories and the multiple sign symbols that children can use to have a voice. Finally, it approaches the uses of multiliteracies including play.

Not all emergent literacy experiences are the same. The National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) (2013) definition of 21st century literacies is aligned with the premise that literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of groups. Schools should take account of social factors outside of school in helping pupils acquire the reading and writing skills required by schooling. Studies (Heath, 1982, Street, 2012) show that both oral and written traditions are important to promote readers and writers. What matters is how children make sense of the world from books and stories; this happens when children relate stories to their real world. Both oral and written traditions contribute to children's language and literacy development, especially when

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