



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(7): 544-547
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 19-05-2017
Accepted: 20-06-2017

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Is storytelling an effective means for identifying and understanding the language of emotion and behaviour? An intervention

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Abstract

The present article explores whether storytelling can be used to develop insights into the manner in which young children of 3-6 years identify and understand the language of emotion and behaviour. Following the preliminary analysis, it can be revealed that storytelling can modify the behaviour of children in an appropriate way. The present study seeks to investigate the extent to which the storytelling can encourage young children to share emotions and experiences, and learn from one another. My research analysis involved audio and video recording of storytelling and discussions, held over a period of 1 year. The investigator used purposive sampling in order to select a sample of four children coming from mixed ethnicity, gender, ability, and socio-economic background. The results confirmed that storytelling encourages children in sharing feelings, emotions and experiences, and in general it supports young children outside formal learning settings.

Keywords: Storytelling, social skills, behaviour, emotions

1. Introduction

Growth and development of children come from different sources and theories given by Piaget, Erickson, Vygotsky, Kohlberg etc. These theories have provided vital and important information regarding the nature of development. There are three broad stages of development in human's life: early childhood, middle adulthood and adolescence. Early Childhood stage is the foundation period of life. It covers 2 - 6 years of human's life. It is a period of rapid development in children physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and language as well.

We use various methods to enhance the development of children physically, mentally, socially etc. Storytelling is one of those methods. The social and cultural activity of sharing narratives is storytelling. It has been a means of sharing in every culture. It has been the interactive art of using words and actions in order to describe the elements and images of a story. It helps in encouraging listener's imagination power. It is not only a means of entertainment but also used for education, cultural preservation and instilling moral values. Oral storytelling in school creates social space and encourages sharing among children (Parfitt, 2014) ^[17]. Another study says that storytelling has also been studied as a means of sharing cultural knowledge, ideologies and values within the indigenous communities of America (Iseke, 2013) ^[11]. Studies by Zipes showed that children's behaviour are used to be modified by using storytelling techniques from the very ancient days. It has been a means of influencing behaviour. The use of moralistic stories were used by the adults in order to cultivate feelings of shame and to arouse anxiety in children when they did not follow more inhibiting way of social conduct (Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization, 1991) ^[25]. Stories are therefore, useful in socializing children towards socially approved forms of emotional and behavioural expression. It can be said that children learn from, about and through stories, and learn through reflecting on the experience of narrating and the narrating of experience (Cortazzi & L, 2007) ^[6].

Bruner (1986) ^[2, 3] stated that narratives and stories are helpful in constructing a version of ourselves in the world, and culture provides models of identity and agency to its members through storytelling or sharing events and their experiences (Bruner, Actual minds, possible worlds, 1986) ^[2, 3].

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A storyteller should choose a good story to narrate, one that is enchanting and enjoyable, with universal truths those are grounded in everyday human experience (Mooney & Holt, 1996) ^[16]. The intimate connection among the story, the audience, and the teller are the foundations of extraordinary power of storytelling (Livo & Reitz, 1986) ^[13]. Sharing a story or narration most of the times creates direct connection and the feelings in such a way that they become the remembered and valued elements of the experience. In another study it was stated that the imaginative performance of a storyteller becomes a means of creating emotions that outlasted memory. Storytelling was used to shape perceptions, beliefs and influence emotions as well (Sawyer, 1942) ^[20]. There is four components of storytelling that affect listeners' emotional lives. They are the narrative's description of emotions, the teller's emotional stance, the listener's expectations, and the listener's emotional response (Kirkwood, 2000) ^[12].

Rather than directly advising someone how to act, in many traditional Native American cultures, fables were used to modify one's behaviour and the way of thinking in an appropriate way. This is because it is the story which provides the appropriate moral and behavioural lessons (SunWolf 1999: 51; 2004) ^[21]. Some of the other researchers stated that improvements in education and language ability could be bought through narrative exposure (Clark and Rossiter, 2008; Cortazzi and Jin, 2007) ^[5, 6].

1.1 Objective of the study

(1) To explore whether storytelling can be used as a technique of developing insights into the manner in which young children of 3-6 years identify and understand the language of emotion and behaviour.

1.2 Hypothesis

H₀: Storytelling doesn't develop insights in the young children belonging to the age group of 3-6 years in identifying and understanding the language of emotion and behaviour.

2. Procedural and methodological section

2.1 Selection of the subjects or participants of the study

Purposive sampling was used in selecting a group of four children belonging to the age group of 3-6 years. The four children were, as much as possible, of mixed gender, ethnicity, ability, and socio-economic background. The parents were informed about the purpose of the study.

2.2 Decision about the instrument or methods of data collection

Observation through video and audio recording was used for the assessment of the insights in the young children in identifying and understanding the language of emotion and behaviour. The conversations were transcribed into English language and then coded by the investigator with the use of software named N Vivo.

3. Research Design used in research study

3.1 About the design

In this study, storytelling was used as an independent variable and social skills and behaviour of children as dependent variables. It was a exploratory, qualitative study where the main aim was to explore the influence of storytelling on the development of social skills in small

children belonging to the age group of 3-6 years in identifying and understanding the language of emotion and behaviour. Audio and video recordings were used to record the activities conducted during the storytelling session. The discussion among the four children and the investigator was recorded for future use while data analysis. The investigator transcribed the dialogues and two copies of transcript were sent to the professionals with the recordings. They reviewed the transcript, checked for accuracy, made corrections, designated portions to be excluded, and then returned that copy of the transcript to the investigator.

3.2 Procedure adopted for data collection

Investigator used folk tales which were selected on general themes such as family, love, and transformations, following the results of a pilot study. Investigator herself played the role of storyteller. For being an efficient storyteller, she visited to many storytellers and attended the sessions of storytelling for duration of one month. After being prepared, she narrated the story to the children as she wished as long as it was from memory. Each of the four children received the same stories in the same order from week one to week five simultaneously. Week three consisted of two contrasting stories. After each storytelling session, the investigator initiated group conversation. It was expected that the children talk about emotions during their process of meaning-making. The questions asked by the investigator were related to the stories and were designed in order to facilitate conversation. They touched on emotions and behaviour without guiding them towards a specific outcome. The stories were selected in such a way that they would facilitate conversations among the investigator and the children. The opportunity of sharing was given to the children, so that they had the choice to share what they wished to in the group. In between the discussion regarding what was right and wrong, the investigator encouraged an individual child to elaborate, but with the option to decline to do so if he/she wished. The investigator used this technique as a type of intervention where there was full freedom for children to respond in their own ways. Audio and video recordings were used to observe the activities, social skills, practices, course of action, turn taking, syntax for conversation, the structure of speech events, and the integration of speech and gesture.

Some of the variables couldn't be controlled during the session. Those variables were storytelling space, individual perspectives and interaction amongst the children and wider narratives worked together to shape the process of meaning-making. Audio and video recordings were used to explore what narratives children linked to the stories, if any, and what they shared in the groups in terms of emotion and behaviour, which the investigator felt would allow the planning of further research based on what this group of small children revealed.

4. Inferential and concluding section

4.1 Data analysis techniques

During the process of data analysis, the aim of the investigator was to identify phrases/conversations that contained personal content around the subject of 'private life, relationships, and emotions. The analyzed data included all naturally occurring behaviour from either ordinary conversation i.e. ordinary chatting among children and courses of action, turn-taking and repair practices, syntax-

for-conversation, the structure of speech events, and the integration of speech and gesture. The study explored on participants' contextualized perspectives and interpretations of behaviour and events. The conversational and other behaviours that participant produced for each other in real time were also included in the primary data. The talk that immediately preceded and followed the conversational object under study; those were sometimes referred to as the context of talk. The integration of embodied action and gesture of children with talk was included in other aspects of context. Data collection methods included the collection of videotapes, audiotapes, or both of talk-in-interaction. They were transcribed according to the conventions. In all cases, the recordings were considered to be the definitive and primary source of information about the behaviours those were observed. Transcripts were understood as a means of analysis. They were used in conjunction with recordings.

4.2 Analyses

Only qualitative methods were used for analyzing the data. Investigator transcribed audio and video recordings from the researcher-child activities on a computer by using software named Nvivo. Identifying information was removed from the transcriptions and then the investigator coded each transcription. The investigator then developed the coding scheme and revised them as well.

The investigator coded for the items by using software for the children's dialogue: number of adjectives and adverbs, number of objects mentioned from the event object list, number of other objects that were not on the event object list, number of concepts mentioned from event concept list, and number of activities mentioned from the event activities list. The investigator also coded every sentence of the dialogue they used during conversation. Sentences were coded as memory questions, which were when the investigator asked a child to provide a piece of information from memory about the story. When the investigator asked a child a question in which the child is only required to confirm or deny information provided by her, the sentences were coded as yes/no questions. When there was a statement that did not require a response such as 'wow' or 'okay', the sentences were coded as context statements. Finally, the investigator coded them as evaluations, which were when the investigator confirmed or denied the child's previous statement as correct or incorrect. Coding was also done for repeated memory questions and yes or no questions. Those repeated questions were questions that had previously been asked by the investigator. Repeated context statements, were the statements those which were contextually very similar or exactly the same as the previous statement were also accounted for. For each individual question that the investigator asked, she coded for the number of words, the number of adjectives and adverbs, the number of objects mentioned from the event object list, the number of other objects that were not on the event object list, the number of activities mentioned, the number of concepts mentioned, as well as the number of correct details mentioned, which were the number of objects and concepts listed by the children those were involved in the sessions of storytelling. For all of the questions combined, the total number of unique objects and total number of unique concepts were coded one by one. Unique objects and concepts were used in the place where the total number of unique objects or concepts mentioned from the list when counting each object or concept only

once. Finally, the number of words and the total number of sentences via the computer for both the child and the investigator in the conversation were systematically obtained. Lastly, during the data analysis, the investigator kept a record of the codes, categories, and themes applied in describing and interpreting the data and information obtained through observation of the recordings. In this way the chain of evidences could be produced by the investigator. In order to maintain the validity and reliability of the study, after conducting a pilot study, the investigator used audio and video recording in the final session of storytelling to have a detailed analysis of the behaviour of children. Once the study was completed, the investigator asked seniors and professors of the institute to evaluate the study and provide feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the study. It was an attempt by the investigator in order to make an objective appraisal of this qualitative study to monitor and evaluate the investigator's subjectivity and perspective. All of the above methods contributed in increasing the validity, reflexivity, and audibility of the present study.

4.3 Result

The hypothesis of the study was storytelling doesn't develop insights in the young children belonging to the age group of 3-6 years in identifying and understanding the language of emotion and behaviour. The study confirmed that the creation of a storytelling space encourage children to share information about events and experiences in their personal lives. Apart from this, it could also be revealed that in one or the other way listening to the stories helped children to interact without fear, understand the gestures and reactions of the people around, understand small instructions etc.

4.4 Conclusion and interpretation

From the entire process, it was found that all the four children developed social skills like ways of dealing with others that create healthy and positive interactions. They could communicate clearly, calmly, and respectfully. They could share their ideas comfortably without fear. Social interaction might be the reason behind the development of these social skills in children in a storytelling context rather than a list of questions or the storytelling space on its own. It demonstrated that social interaction caused children to share more in terms of the storytelling space. The study showed how they were integrated into, or found ways to challenge, prevailing social rules on behaviour and emotion. Analyzing the transcripts in this way was efficient enough to show beneficial effects of the storytelling session. The session of storytelling on the other hand allowed children to share and learn from one another via social interaction. In addition, the present study allowed children to reflect on the influences around them in terms of behaviour and emotion. Insights into the confirmative and subversive effects of narrative influences surrounding young children were also provided. The children were more able in identifying the setting, the moral of the story, and the characters from the stories.

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