

The Little Red Hen and a Corona Giant: Creative Storytelling as a Transformative Strategy in an Early Childhood Classroom

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Abstract

Storytelling is a natural means of communication between generations and is deeply rooted in culture. In today's classrooms, the act of storytelling is often overshadowed by a narrow focus on academics. However, storytelling could be viewed as a means of transformative education by creating autonomous, independent thinkers as demonstrated in this manuscript. Children can use storytelling as a way to demonstrate depth of understanding, apply critical thinking skills, and to be active learners in their own education. This study details the use of a creative storytelling strategy implemented in an early childhood classroom which was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The end result is a two-phase study which concluded with pre-kindergarten aged children using storytelling to discuss and display their perceptions of Coronavirus in an academic setting.

Keywords: Storytelling, Early Childhood Education, COVID pandemic

Introduction

Storytelling is deeply rooted in the belief that children learn through stories verbally shared across generations and often involving an interesting mixture of folklore and history. In today's classrooms, the act of storytelling is often overshadowed by a narrow focus on academics in classrooms. However, children can use storytelling as a way to demonstrate depth of their understanding, thinking, lived experiences and needs. For example, compare the following two teaching strategies. First, a book is read to children which might be disconnected from their lives and prior experiences while encouraging passive listening skills (Global Institute for Transformative Education, 2021). Second, the same story is shared through a storytelling strategy where the children are given the opportunity to actively engage, take ownership, and construct their own meanings from the content. The second example clearly demonstrates the type of transformative education we

hope to encourage in classrooms. The overarching goal of this study was to use a storytelling as a creative strategy in an early childhood classroom to open space for children for "dialoging" (Bakhtin, 1984) with the world to express themselves, their emotions and feelings, and lived experiences in a creative way.

The following manuscript details the use of a creative storytelling strategy implemented in an early childhood classroom which was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The end result is a two-phase study which concluded with pre-kindergarten aged children using storytelling to discuss and display their perceptions of Coronavirus.

Literature Review

Oral storytelling is an ancient and may be the earliest form of teaching. It serves a dual purpose of entertaining and transmitting cultural beliefs and values from one generation to the next in many cultures including Latinx (Melzi, Schick & Scarola, 2018) and African American (Champion, 2003). Under-studied in

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education (Hibbin, 2016a), it continues to maintain cultural practices and traditions over time, socialize children into their cultures, and aid their overall development (Barton & Barton, 2017; Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019; Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Storytelling attracts children to books (Ritchie, James-Szanton, & Howes, 2003) and excite the imagination, involve the listeners, and motivate children to try storytelling themselves and create their own techniques (Morrow, 2020).

Storytelling is a form of transformational education that helps children to understand dynamics between their inner and outer worlds and the expansion of consciousness and the working toward a meaningful integrated life as evidenced in authentic relationships with self and others” (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 261). What is storytelling? The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has provided a definition of oral storytelling as “relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture” (Teaching Storytelling, 1992). This simple definition considers the inherently social nature of storytelling that requires a listening audience to fulfil its definitional requirements. It also tacitly invokes the oral nature of storytelling whereby the tale is ‘related’ and not ‘read,’ and the emphasis upon ‘voice and gesture’ implicitly denies the use of a script. Bromley (2019) defines an oral story as any text that is imaginative, a retelling of a story or a recount of an experience.

Traditional storytelling in an early childhood classroom is a product of students interacting socially with the elements in a book (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018). An example of a traditional storytelling activity comes from research conducted on early childhood students experiencing the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1987; Ford, 2009). These early childhood students enjoyed performing the book in addition to exploring the life cycle of a caterpillar through literacy centers.

In the profession of early childhood, storytelling was promoted by teacher researcher Vivian Paley (Copper, 2019). In Paley’s classroom, children dictate and dramatize their stories. Research findings suggest that Paley’s storytelling approach to teaching and learning positively affect young children’s vocabulary and language skills and can serve as a feasible alternative to the skills-dominant and teacher-neutral early literacy curricula increasingly prevalent in pre-school classrooms around the country (Nicolopoulou, 2019; Ripstein, 2018). Moreover, as da Costa, Davim, Barbosa, & da Silva (2016) state storytelling has the power to

improve a child’s oral language skills, writing, and increase their vocabularies. More recent research (Gardner-Neblett & Sideris, 2017) conducted with children who are African American has found that the ability to tell a clear and coherent story is important for the development of reading skills.

Storytelling significantly increases children’s literacy skills along with self-regulation of emotions, communication and negotiation with peers, imagination, fantasy, humor, and creativity (Maureen, Van der Meji & De Jong, 2018). Dyson (2009) highlights how as young writers tell stories they appropriate others’ voices (from home, school, community and media), thus expanding their knowledge about social practices, symbolic systems and their social world. There is difference in cognitive requirement between the experience of picture-book reading and that of storytelling, according to neuroscience research (Ten, Van der Putten, Penne, Maes, Vlaskamp, 2016; Miyuki, Sachie, Satochi, Masato, Kazuto, Hirooki & Sinichi, 2018). The experience of storytelling requires more demanding level of active imagination from listeners. When the brain is active, concentration and attention are at work which contributes to information retention and comprehension. Thus, the difference in the prefrontal activation between the picture-book reading and the storytelling may reflect the difference in the cognitive demands for the act of imagining.

While storytelling is a practice common to all cultures and most children enter school with a basic understanding of narrative form (Meek, 1988), it is not widely accepted practice as compared to story reading. Speaking and listening is implicitly devalued as a result of the elevation of instrumental literacy-based practice in the primary curriculum (Hibbin, 2016b). Typically, schools place importance on the development of narrative skills in writing but provide few opportunities for children to create and tell stories orally, once children become writers (Dawkins & O’Neill, 2011).

In a busy curriculum-focused environment, the strategy of storytelling allows space and time to stop and listen to students in meaningful and purposeful way, while facilitating their learning (Bromley, 2019; Cooper, Capo, Karen, Mathes, & Gray, 2007). It is a transformative approach as it challenges students to be active rather than passive learners. Storytelling approach encourages students and teachers to think critically and requires communities to rethink curricula to create space for students to analyze the universe (Global Institute for Transformative Education, 2021).



Free-ranging, teacher-scaffolded activities, storytelling activities and curriculum in the early childhood classroom validate who the children are, what they know, and what they care about. Thus, “the need for early childhood teachers to retain their historical focus on oral language-based curricula that are directed at fair and equitable goals for young children—like the storytelling curriculum—has never been greater” (Cooper, Capo, Karen, Mathes, & Gray, 2007, p. 273).

Ironically, the study itself mirrors the unpredictability of researching during the 2019 Coronavirus pandemic. Our research quest was to learn how children respond to stories presented through storytelling strategies involving two-step method: 1) presenting a story to children using puppet show and 2) inviting children to respond, orally or in drawings, by re-telling the presented story or by creating their own stories. The working definition of storytelling in this study is oral re-telling of traditional tales, modelled by a storyteller, and taught to children. The study detailed in this manuscript emphasizes the importance of storytelling.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we draw upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895-1975), literary and cultural theorist and philosopher’s work that emphasizes plurality of voices. In essence, Bakhtin’s work is concerned with the oppressive character of monologue, the monopolization of meaning, and the ruling out and suppressing of all competing voices. To counteract a “monologue” of prescribed preschool curricula driven by developmental norms and academic standards and standardized practices like book reading, we aimed to build upon the voices and stories of young children to allow them to learn and transform through creative literacy, play and performance. Like Bakhtin, we believe that life is an ongoing, finalizable dialogue taking place at every moment of human existence.

“To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, souls, spirit, and with his whole body and deeds... He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 292-293).

Such a view imposes difference, uncertainty, playfulness, surprise, and open-endedness as necessary, positive, and productive aspects of human condition (Sterritt, 1998). However, what crucial to Bakhtinian dialogue is a finely tuned sense of listening. Bakhtin believed that by not listening we reject, disrespect, and disempower the speaker and the message. When we listen to children, we empower them. We learn about their inner thoughts, emotions, fears, anxiety, and joys through the act of storytelling. Transformative education such as this displays a dramatic shift in views of teaching and learning, a shared ownership in education, a true sense of what it means to have student-teacher partnerships within the classroom (Global Institute for Transformative Education, 2021).

As the profession of early childhood education takes a deep interest in a more culturally sensitive, collaborative, strength-oriented, and empowering approach practices, Bakhtin’s ideas seem ever more prominent. In current times of uncertainty and unrest, there is a robust need for dialoging with and listening to the children we serve. Inviting children to engage in creating and telling their own stories is about opening a space for plurality of voices, innovation, wonder, potentiality, freedom, and creativity that transcend monologic thinking and inform and expand traditional mundane classroom approaches of teaching and learning.

Storytelling Procedures

This study was conducted in two phases pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19. Beginning in the Spring 2020, three researchers visited the setting to begin to establish a comfortable rapport with the children, classroom, and school. After obtaining families consent, around February 2020, the researchers introduced the idea of traditional storytelling to the teacher. During this time, once a week for five weeks, the researchers started the project by presenting a folk story using a puppet show as the main storytelling method. The storytelling technique implemented in our study complemented that of Bromley (2019). The teacher told stories and children use teacher’s story as a springboard to develop their own stories.

The plan was to visit each week to engage in storytelling activities during the circle time. After presenting the same story a few times, we planned to invite children to create their own stories using the presented story as a springboard. The first story presented to children was a simple version of The Little Red Hen story, an American folk tale meant to teach children the



importance of hard work and personal initiative. The main characters used in this puppet show – the hen, cat and mouse – were hand-made by team members. Both the cat and mouse were made from wool and the hen was knitted using a wool thread (see Figure 1). The story characters were available to the children afterwards to imitate and play with the puppets.



Figure 1. *The Little Red Hen* characters

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the research came to an abrupt halt in spring 2020 after seven visits to the site. The study was able to resume in fall 2020 during COVID-19; however, many barriers existed. The participants were all new to the classroom and non-essential visitors were not allowed in the classroom due to COVID-19 precautions. Therefore, research continued in an online synchronous mode through the use of Zoom. The children were gathered around a Swivl which held an iPad. Swivl is a robot which can hold an iPad and rotates automatically to the marker. The marker is similar in shape to a remote control and allows for virtually interactions to feel more in sync. Minimal issues occurred when utilizing the technology; however, one concern was that the iPad screen size was limited for the children to view.

Study Context and Participants

The school was intentionally chosen because of its proximity to the researchers, openness to research, and a shared history with the researchers. The school consists of 464 students, preschool through eighth grade (see Table 1). The classroom is nestled within the preschool wing with approximately 110 children. The participants in phase one included 15 preschool children, ages three and four (see Table 2). The participation rate for the class was 94%. The participants in

phase two included 11 preschool children ages three and four (see Table 3). The participation rate for the class was 85%. Additionally, one lead teacher and one assistant, consistent in both phases of the study, contributed greatly to arranging the technology and reporting information back to the researchers.

Table 1. Demographics of school by ethnicity

Ethnicity	%
American Indian	.1
Asian	.6
Black	1.5
Hispanic	8.0
White	86.6
Multiracial	3.2
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0

Table 2. Demographics of participants in phase 1

Gender	N	%
Female	7	46.6
Male	8	53.4

Table 3. Demographics of participants in phase 2

Gender	N	%
Female	6	54.5
Male	5	45.5

Storytelling Technique Phase 2

Due to COVID-19 precautions, all storytelling times in phase two of the study, were completed virtually through the use of Zoom. During phase two, the research team virtually presented a Corona Giant therapeutic story to help children to deal with anxiety and stress they experience with all the changes and adaptations they deal on a daily basis. The children were presented this story three times within a week for approximately two weeks. The children were given the opportunity to contribute their own stories using the Corona Giant as a springboard. They could share their stories right after the presentation or later to their teachers orally or in drawings.

During phase two, the research team virtually presented a therapeutic story to help children to deal with anxiety and stress they experience with all the changes



and adaptations they deal on a daily basis. This story, inserted below, was originally created by Susan Perrow (2012) and was slightly modified by the researchers to adapt to the current pandemic situation.

Corona Giant

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there lived a giant who was the strongest, largest, and most destructive creature ever to have lived on earth.

The strange thing was that no one had never seen the giant, but many had experienced its dark shadow as it traveled around the earth, leaving destructions everywhere. People called it the Corona Giant.

The Corona Giant was continually busy every day and night, moving around the world, stamping its dark presence on the Earth, in every city, every village, and every home making children and their families stay away from each other and making them feel lonely and fearful. No one knew where the Corona Giant lived and how to conquer it. No one was safe from it— not the adults or children.

The Giant, who lived high up in the Silver Castle above the clouds, heard news of these terrible events from the birds. She was very worried about the Corona Giant and the evil work it was doing on the Earth below. She decided to call a meeting and sent out an invitation to all the birds of the air everywhere in the world.

On the day of the meeting, the Giant was seated on her silver throne, beautiful in her flowing gown. All around her were gathered many birds: birds from every part of the world, birds of all colors and shapes and sizes, birds of the land and birds of the sea, birds of the day and birds of the night.

Patiently and carefully, the Giant listened to each and every bird. When all the stories had been told, the Giant spoke to the gathering:

"There must be a way to overcome this dark force that is taking over the earth. Every enemy has a weakness! Fly back where you have come from and try to find where the Corona Giant lives.

Then you can observe what weakness it may have. Report back to me as soon as you can...There is not a moment to lose!"

So, the birds flew back to their homes around the world and kept a careful watch where the giant lives. Days passed, weeks passed, months passed.

When it was almost a year, an old owl finally found the giant. He was flying high around mountains searching for something to eat and flew into a deep dark cave. Inside this cave was a huge, dark, mumbling, rumbling, figure. It was of no definite shape. In fact, its shape seemed to change sizes and form with every sound it made. Sometimes, it looked like a giant red squid with many tentacles, other times, it turned into a scary, bear-like figure and stomped angrily. As he stomped, he repeatedly chanted these mumblings and rumblings:

*All for me and me for all,
Eating all things big and small.
Greed is my game and Power is my name*

The owl hid in a far corner of the cave and watched and listened, as owls can do very well. Finally, the ugly, dark creature fell asleep. The owl quickly and quietly flew out of the deep mountain cave. Then, he began the long journey across the sky, all the way to the castle of the Giant. As he flew higher and higher, he kept saying the awful mumblings and rumblings so he would not forget them.

*All for me and me for all,
Eating all things big and small.
Greed is my game and Power is my name*

When the Giant heard the story from the owl, she immediately recognized Giant's weakness:

The Corona Giant only cares for itself - it only wants power for itself.

Then the Giant called for her helpers, the birds and she said: "Fly out around the world and sing this message to people. If they work together and care for each other, then they can slowly, but surely win this dark shadow that is harming the children and families".



*Strength in caring, strength in togetherness,
Can overcome the giant's selfishness.*

The birds flew out to all parts of the world and as they flew, they sang the message from the Giant for all people on Earth to hear.

And to this day, the birds are signing their song. Sometimes they even drop feather messages which flutter softly to the ground. When people find these feathers lying on the ground (in the garden, on the street, or in the forest they know that this message has been sent directly to them. They pick up the feathers and they remember the message that has been sent to them by the Giant:

Strength in caring, strength in togetherness!

And slowly but surely, the wisdom of the song of the birds is helping the children and adults of the world to overcome the dark power of the Corona Giant.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data in this two-phase basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) came from children's drawings, audio recordings of children's stories, photographs of children's work, and recordings of all virtual storytelling visits with the children. Data collection and analysis were not separate processes but were interconnected and simultaneous (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) to gain insight into the main themes that emerged from children's responses to the storytelling intervention. The recordings, images of storytelling episodes were reviewed and analyzed using thematic coding and inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), that promotes proceeding from specific to general. The two faculty researchers analyzed the data separately and then compared findings to validate thematic findings.

Findings

The overarching goal of this study was to use storytelling as a creative strategy in an early childhood classroom to open space for plurality of voices that transcend monologic thinking driven by adults' agenda and inform and expand traditional mundane classroom approaches of teaching and learning. As Pushor explains, "When they come to school, they come with this multiplicity and contextuality, not independent of it" (2010, p. 7). Therefore, it is important to create a space

for helping children to express themselves and their lived experiences in a creative way. Storytelling is about innovation, wonder, potentiality, freedom, and creativity that arise through plurality of voices, ideas and perspectives. Having such space in a classroom challenges, expands, and transcends traditional routine of teaching and learning practices. The following two themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) Storytelling makes children story makers, story tellers, and story actors and 2) Corona and children.

Storytelling makes children story makers, story tellers and story actors. Children in this classroom always engaged in various pretend play activities using prompts in dramatic play area. It was observed, however, that storytelling intervention provokes children to play with the story prompts and imitate the observed presentation. Having a shared play idea, stemmed from the story plot, provides a topic for conservation motivating children to socialize, engage, construct scenarios elevating their play to mature level that results in learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2008). It became visible that storytelling intervention provokes children to play with the story prompts and imitate the observed presentation. The concrete prompts and story table setting provide some direction inexplicitly making the children storytellers. These items were intentionally left in the setting during phase 1 to encourage interaction and retelling of stories. Engaged in dialoguing with each other (see Figure 2) they either repeated the same plot or come up with their own remarks for the characters. Children carry their ideas on into their dramatic play and the story continues to evolve and change including new toys, materials, and players. The conversation enhanced social interaction and communication among children.



Figure 2. Children presenting *The Little Red Hen*

Analysis of data also illustrates that children use the presented story characters and some elements of it as a springboard for making stories. For instance, see Figure 3 below. The child created his own version of the Corona Giant story by twisting the plot in his own way. In this picture, the Corona Giant is imprisoned, and the queen and birds are celebrating their victory. It is important to notice here, that the illustrations are solely a product of child's imagination since the story was presented orally without the text. The child "translated" the auditory information onto the paper giving a shape and form to story characters he envisioned in his mind while he listened to the story. These mental representations derived from his previous knowledge and experiences.



Figure 3. A child's story

During the storytelling time, children immersed in the spirit of presented stories. The children became not only story makers, but story tellers and story actors as well. Consider the four-year old's child's dictated story below:

It is actually like the queen and the prince live is a mountain on a castle with bears. And the princess was actually abandoned because she stealed [sic] all the joy and then they found the real princess at the witch castle. And then the birds pecked her and then she heard it so much, and then they fall to the ground, and then they go back to the castle and then the end.

This simultaneously simple and complex creation indicates the author's expressive and receptive vocabulary, awareness of words in sentences, phonemic awareness, and understanding of the meaning of the words. It has a beginning, some drama in the middle, and the end and represents a child's world of thinking and living.

Children take the story ideas and words into their dialogues, exchanges, and act them out in their dramatic play by intentional storytelling. For instance, consider this children's dialogue that was observed on 01/31/20. Three girls are playing in dramatic play area:

Child 1: *Pretends to be a hen from the Little Red Hen story and ask her two playmates:*

Who wants to sweep the floor?

Child 2: *(standing on her knees, pretending to be a cat)* Not I!

Child 3: *(sitting and presenting to be a mouse)* Not I!

Child 1: Who wants to help me to eat breakfast?

Child 2 & Child 3: I do, I do!

Child 1: Promise me you help me, and I will share the breakfast with you.

Child 2 & Child 3: Nod their heads.

The presented *Little Red Hen* story plot was used here by these three children to organize their play, communicate, socialize and learn. Stories enhance the child's inner world and result in imaginative play. Thus, the provided stories have a power to stimulate and foster dramatic play in early childhood classrooms.

Corona and children. This theme emerged in most of the children's stories, drawings and dialogues in the forms of a germ, princesses, and giants. Analysis of 10 children's drawings collected resulted in one about a germ, four on princesses, and five on giants. The drawing featuring the word "germ" was of a child keeping the germ from entering the child's house (see Figure 4). Of interest, was the fact that the child felt confident in preventing the germ from entering the home; thereby, able to protect the family. Additional analysis would have been beneficial to explore how the child planned to keep the germ from entering the home. Would it have been health measures emphasized in the classroom, school, and community such as washing hands, staying at least six feet apart, etc.? Or would the child have created an imaginary world in which superpowers would have served as a protective force?

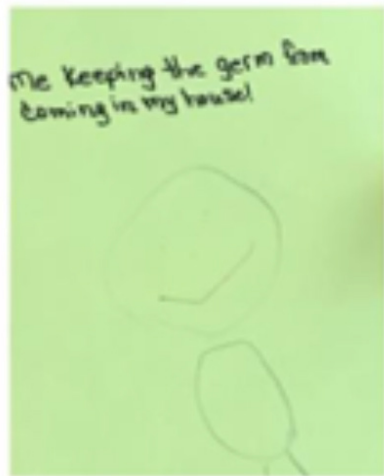


Figure 4. Child's drawing - germ

Four of the drawings collected featured princesses. All princesses were smiling in the drawings. Ideas emerged such as a princess being saved by a knight, the princess getting to see her family (see Figure 5), the princess and her friends, and the princess enjoying the sun. Of interest to our study, was the drawing of a princess getting to see her family. Additional analysis would have been beneficial to determine why the princess was unable to see her family. Was the princess in quarantine which would have mimicked reality or was the princess, as often pictured in fairytales, captured and waiting to be rescued?



Figure 5. Child's drawing – princess

A giant was the most featured object in the children's drawings. Consistently, the giant was angry or mad as evidenced by the children's wording of "The giant is mad! Something is in his way!"; "The giant is mad! He didn't like the people!"; "The giant stomped all over the world!"; "The giant is walking to the city."; "The giant is being watched by the birds!". The last quotation was the only giant pictured as smiling. All other giants had straight lines for a V shaped mouth, a horizontal line (see Figure 6), or a sad face. A likely correlation to the Corona Giant story was that the birds were helpful to the giant; therefore, the giant was pictured as smiling.



Figure 6. Child's drawing - giant

This topic is also captured in one of the dialogues between the researcher and the children:

Researcher: So, what happened when Corona Giant came to your city? What did you do?

Children: Wear a mask!

Researcher: Mask. Oh, yes. That's how we changed.

Children: And be safe.

Teacher: And where can't you go now?

Child: I can't go to Chuck E. Cheese now until Corona's gone.

Child: I can't go to McDonald's playground.

Child: I wanted to go to the movie and they said no, it's closed.

Researcher: Yes, so the Corona Giant is making us do and not to do so many things. This is what I would like you to do children. Since I cannot see you guys, I mean I cannot come to your school. Can you draw your story for me?

Child: Yes!

Child: I already made a book. I can make another book about Corona the Giant.

Discussion

The limited amount of collected data due to COVID-19 pandemic suggests that a storytelling approach to teaching and learning can positively affect young children's learning and development by making them story makers, story tellers, and story actors. To become a story maker, one needs to listen to absorb the language and ideas of others.

A well-crafted and intentionally chosen narrative helps children to make sense of the world, imagine and "give birth" to their own stories to express, communicate and 'dialogue' (Bakhtin, 1984). As it was observed in data, for a child as young as three or four, a simple dot on a paper or drawing is a story. When there is a story, there is a point to communicate, idea to express, and reason to participate in the "carnival" (Bakhtin, 1984) of the social world. Creative storytelling strategies promote active engagement in the learning process which can become transformative in nature. This way, telling stories promotes children's language skills that stimulates overall development (Nicolopoulou, 2019; Ripstein, 2018). Practicing and mastering listening and oral language skills establishes profound foundation for children to become confident readers and writers at later stages (Hibbin, 2016b). It was also found that young children who heard the stories told demonstrated improved story comprehension in their retelling, while children in the story reading group improved their language complexity (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lawrence, 2004).

Moreover, the creative storytelling intervention provokes young children to engage in dramatic play by imitating the observed practice. Normally, preschool children participate in physical play, object play, pretend (or socio-dramatic) play, and guided play. Together, they comprise four broad categories, each of which is based on the developmental purpose it serves and the relationship of each type to children's learning.

This is important for today's world where not all children know how to play (Bodrova, 2001, Karpov, 2005) and their play does not elevate to level when it results in learning (Gudareva, 2005). Only mature, sophisticated level of play triggers cognition and promotes self-regulation (Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2003).

Storytelling is different than reading and it requires more active work of the brain. When the brain is active, concentration and attention are at work which contributes to information retention and comprehension (Ten, Van der Putten, Penne, Maes, Vlaskamp, 2016; Miyuki, Sachie, Satoshi, Masato, Kazuto, Hirooki & Sinichi, 2018). Children need to use their imaginative powers to illustrate the story scenes in their mind to project it on paper or play later. However, the child's response/creation does not directly mirror the adults 'story but rather intertwined with his own inner worries, concerns, thinking and understating of the world. This became visible in children's illustrations of Corona Giant narrative as they work was 'painted' by their fears of germs, separation of families, concerns about safety and overall underling anxiety about the pandemic situation. Telling and expressing their inner needs and emotions has a power to foster positive identity, empathic understanding of self and others and bi-directional communication (Hibbin, 2016a).

Therefore, it can be concluded that storytelling invites children to become story makers, story tellers and story actors to think creatively and engage in dialogue with others and the world. The intentional organization of storytelling activity can be used as a tool to promote language, literacy, vocabulary, socio-emotional development, self-expression, identification with story characters, empathic understanding of self and others, culture and identity. It stimulates intrinsic motivation for play. The concrete prompts and story table setting provide some direction inexplicitly inviting the children to play. The classroom with storytelling and play can serve as a feasible alternative to the skills-dominant and teacher-neutral early literacy curricula increasingly prevalent in pre-kindergarten classrooms around the country.

The oral re-telling of traditional tales, modelled by a storyteller and taught to children in school, can be understood as 'non-instrumental' practice in speaking and listening that emphasizes oral language over the reading and writing of stories. Hibbin (2016a) suggests that psychosocial development of young people in school can be encouraged and actively pursued with



opportunities afforded by oral storytelling for self-expression, identification with story characters, empathic understanding of self and others and bi-directional communication.

In a busy curriculum-focused environment, the strategy of storytelling allows space and time to stop and listen to students in meaningful and purposeful way, while facilitating their learning (Bromley, 2019; Cooper, Capo, Karen, Mathes, & Gray, 2007). Free-ranging, teacher-scaffolded activities storytelling activities and curriculum in the early childhood classroom validate who the children are, what they know, and what they care about. Thus, “the need for early childhood teachers to retain their historical focus on oral language-based curricula that are directed at fair and equitable goals for young children—like the storytelling curriculum—has never been greater” (Cooper, Capo, Karen, Mathes, & Gray, 2007, p. 273).

Conclusion

Storytelling is deeply rooted in the belief that children learn through stories verbally shared across generations. It is about innovation, wonder, potentiality, freedom, and creativity that arise through plurality of voices, ideas and perspectives. Having such space in a classroom challenges, expands, and transcends traditional routine of teaching and learning practices. However, in today’s classrooms, the act of storytelling is often overshadowed by a narrow focus on academics in classrooms. Therefore, it is important to create a space for helping children to express themselves and their lived experiences in a creative way. Children can use storytelling as a way to demonstrate the depth of their understanding as well as express emotions such as fear, worry, etc. In closure, the following poem was shared with the researchers by an older child.

*Quarantine nothing to do.
Quarantine is it something for you?
Quarantine nothing to do.*

*Quarantine is a boring thing for me and you.
Watch out for germs, they are as hairy as worms.
Take some turns and you will find those germs!*

Children have stories to share with us and it is our responsibility as educators to listen. Whether it is through stories, drawings, or poetry children are creatively expressing themselves. This manuscript details the use of a creative storytelling strategy implemented in an early childhood classroom in two distinct phases due to the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. The result documents a beautiful display of children’s creative storytelling ability and its connectedness to real world events. Work such as this lays the path for transformation in education. It demonstrates the importance of providing young children with the opportunity for an education better suited for global interconnectedness (Global Institute for Transformative Education, 2021).

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